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SPENDTHRIFT TOWN

A Novel

BY
HENRY HUDSON, 2^d
+

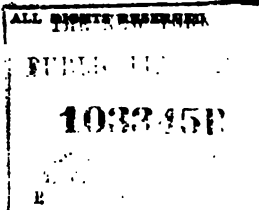


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CHAPTER I

"ЕЕ-ОН, ee-oh!" sang Claire, using a familiar family call and knocking at Jamie's door: "Are you ready?"

"Half a jiff!" a voice answered, adding at once, "Come in!"

Claire opened the door and advanced into Jamie's small hall room. His bed took up the width of it not occupied by the door, making a narrow passage, but beyond its foot stood the bureau, and by the window, an arm-chair and a small table. A few books lay on the table and Jamie's ash-tray which was always untidily full of cigarette ends. Some framed colored prints of various types of feminine beauty adorned the walls, and a private's khaki army cap hung on one corner of the bed. Jamie was standing before the bureau, in his shirt-sleeves, carefully combing his black hair straight back from his forehead. He took so long about it that Claire sat down on the edge of the bed. She was in her coat and hat, ready for the street. Presently she raised her head and sniffed, saying:

"What's the stuff you've been using on your hair lately? *Do* hurry up Jamie!"

Jamie, not satisfied with the effect he had produced,

THE END

had combed it straight down over his eyes, and was beginning again.

"There's loads of time, Claire! How did you know I was using anything?"

"I always know! I can smell it, of course! Oh, Jamie, *please!*" for Jamie had combed his hair down once more. He turned and looked at Claire reproachfully, his comb suspended above his head.

"Now don't make me nervous, Claire, or it'll take twice as long!"

Claire relapsed into silence while Jamie worked industriously, until finally, surveying himself critically in the glass, he exclaimed, "Bing!" emphatically, meaning to convey the information that everything was now to his satisfaction, and immediately began to put on his coat. He turned once more to the glass, took a final tug at his cravat, and asked:

"Don't you like the smell of it?"

"Yes, if it is n't too strong," answered Claire, getting up. "Where did you get it, and where's your hat?"

"Down on the hat-rack! Come along! Mallette brought it from England with him. He sold me two bottles of it."

"Who is Mallette?" asked Claire. "I never heard of *him* before!"

"Oh, yes, I've mentioned him often!" Jamie answered as they descended the stairs. "I met him coming back on the boat. Shall I carry a stick?"

"If you want to, why not?"

"I love to carry one, but hardly anybody does it any more!" And Jamie hesitated.


Claire laughed joyously.

"Oh, Jamie! You silly boy! Carry it if you want to!"

Jamie hesitated again.

"No, I don't think I shall!" And, seizing the knob of the front door, he turned it. Claire passed through, Jamie followed, and, running down the steps together, they began walking toward Fifth Avenue.

The world which they had come out into immediately produced in Claire an extraordinary sense of happiness and well-being. The pavement on which they walked lay in a kind of obscurity, but across the way the serried ranks of houses, cut through at intervals by intersecting streets, glowed mildly in a flood of sunshine which cast gray and violet shadows. The sounds of the city, after the last days of winter just past, had lately taken on a different character, more suave, mellow, and ingratiating. The distant stages on the Avenue, the delivery wagons, the motors, the butchers' boys, pushing their small carts, the cats, the dogs, the horses, the people coming out of houses and going into them, the maids in print dresses stealing a look aloft from area doorways at the benignant masses of floating clouds, seemed to have become endowed with added and unexpected qualities of friendliness and amity, which aroused in Claire, as she inhaled the soft air, a sweet sense of ineffable joy at the thought that she too lived, was wrapped up in life, was part of it, was alive to its



enthraling fascinations, its mysteries, its eternal spell. For the war was over and life was becoming beautiful once more. Each day Claire repeated this last sentence to herself although nearly six months had passed since hostilities had ceased.

All at once Jamie remarked:

"There's no use walking so fast, Claire!"

Claire laughed again, suddenly aware that they had been fairly rushing through the street.

"What time is it, Jamie?"

"Only half-past twelve! The concert begins at two, so you see we have loads of time! Where shall we lunch? Down here somewhere?"

"No, Jamie; let's have a real spree to-day and go to Sherry's!"

"But, I say, I'm hard up!" remonstrated Jamie.

"Then you shall lunch with me! I feel rich to-day! I got a dividend this morning!"

"So did I," answered Jamie, "but I owe it all! Sherry's it is, then! There's a stage!" And at once, and in spite of Jamie's protestations at Claire's speed, they started running, madly furiously, as if their lives depended on their catching that particular one. They dodged motors, whistled, signaled, and finally scrambled on board, breathless and laughing.

"Inside?" asked Jamie.

"No! Of course not!" Claire sprang up the little stairway, Jamie following, and presently they found themselves seated on a front bench, with the long majes-

tic panorama of the Avenue moving slowly past them, the far-off point of its converging cliffs receding always as they advanced. Like their own street, it lay half in shadow, half in sunshine. Moving distant objects sparkled momentarily through the haze lifted from the pavements by the turmoil of traffic and the exhalations of motors. An enormous, obscure, and continuous movement filled the roadway between the cliffs, from end to end of their vision, until their eyes reached, far away, the immobility of distance.

"It's beautiful, is n't it, Jamie!" cried Claire, ecstatically.

"Pretty good," answered Jamie; "but it can't compare with London from the top of a bus; after they let me out of hospital I spent my whole time on the tops of busses. It never opens out here so that you can see anything. You're always shut in between these beastly buildings!"

"But that's beautiful too! It's like a canyon with precipices on either side!"

"But I don't like precipices!"

"You're mad about everything that has to do with London! Even to the smelly stuff you use on your hair, Jamie!"

"You can't *get* it anywhere but there!" Jamie jerked off his hat, and inclined his head. "Just take a whiff and see if it does n't smell good!"

Claire did so.

"Yes, it does!" she admitted.

"Mallette says they send it to English officers all over the world!"

"But who is Mr. Mallette, Jamie? You have n't told me!"

"Oh, he's a star, Claire!" exclaimed Jamie with enthusiasm. "You *must* meet him!"

"A theatrical star?"

"No, that's just an expression! But he *is* an actor! He has n't been for very long. He's been here with one of the British purchasing missions. He was a captain. He got his discharge only a little while ago."

"He's English, I suppose."

"Yes — well, laugh if you want to, but he's awfully clever and interesting. I want him to do a musical comedy with me. I'm working on one of the lyrics now!"

"That sentimental thing you've been playing lately?"

Jamie flushed, and Claire, noticing it, exclaimed contritely: "I did n't mean that, Jamie. I've hardly heard it!"

"That's all right!" Jamie answered.

"Will you play it to me, Jamie?"

Jamie smiled his sweet smile and answered, "Yes."

Claire moved closer to him and murmured, "Oh, Jamie, you're such a dear!"

"Rot!" answered Jamie.

"I hurt your feelings!"

"It probably *is* sentimental! I want you to tell me!"

Claire moved still closer to him, and putting an arm through his, they sat without speaking. Above the build-

ings an occasional flag floated translucently, high in the free air. Out of the distant, obscure turmoil ahead, the sun struck each moment, moving flashes of light, and a roar of sound rose, rebounding from wall to wall of the precipices, which here, at the noon hour, confined, on packed pavements between their granite bases, black masses of stunted, sweatshop workers. Their stage, swaying slightly, pushed aside the surrounding torrent and pressed steadily forward.

"What's it about, Jamie?" Claire asked presently.

"The plot is laid in Pekin," answered Jamie, "and there's a waltz movement running all through it, like this!" Jamie turned and began to hum a waltz, close to Claire's ear, at the same time spreading his hands above his knees and going through the pantomime of a piano accompaniment.

"That's pretty, Jamie. But don't you have to understand orchestration?"

"Oh, no! You hire somebody to do that. The main thing is to get good lyrics. I'll play them for you."

"I'd love to hear them! You must do something *very* original, Jamie, so that everybody will go to see it. I'm sure you can. You really *are* talented!"

"I don't know about that, Claire, but I'm going to try. And, Claire, there's no use in thinking about my going to Paris!"

Claire turned quickly.

"Why not?"

"I spoke to Uncle Edward about it."

"He did n't approve!"

"He wouldn't even discuss it! You know how he is."

"I'll speak to him, Jamie! Shall I?"

"I wish you would, only it won't make any difference, Claire."

Jamie sat silent for a moment plainly depressed, and then exclaimed:

"Hello! there's George — with a friend!" And he waved a greeting to one of two men in bowler hats who were seated on the top of a passing stage, bound toward Washington Square. Claire waved, too, as did one of the men, while the other bowed ceremoniously.

"And by the way," Jamie went on, "What do you think! I hear that George is getting rich!"

"How, Jamie?"

"He was in a dozen things during the war."

"Who told you? George?"

"No fear," answered Jamie. "He might be afraid I'd borrow some of it. A friend in the Street told me!"

"Why should he be afraid? You have money enough of your own!"

"*Have I!*" exclaimed Jamie derisively.

"You've two thousand a year! What do you do with it?"

"What *don't* I do with it! Spend it, of course!" answered Jamie with a pleasant sigh. "So many things—!"

"Do you really spend it all, Jamie?"

"Of course I do!" answered Jamie in surprise, as if

that was obviously what' an income was for. "Don't you spend yours?"

"About half of it!"

"Then if I should ever want —" began Jamie with a significant leer.

"Of course I would, darling! Do you need some now?"

Claire was conscious of a slight feeling of annoyance, which for a moment shadowed her perfect day. She accepted the rumor of George's success without question, because she had a conviction that what George set his hand to do, he would do. But to be so secretive about it! As if everybody might immediately want some of it. They all had enough of their own, and if her darling Jamie *should* need any, it would n't be at all necessary for him to go to George! She almost hoped Jamie would answer that he *was* sorely in need of money so that she might shower him with it, both for the delight it would give her and as a protest against George's failure to take the family into his confidence. But Jamie answered in his pleasant, rather whimsical voice:

"That was only in fun! I don't really need any, Claire!"

"Sure?"


"Sure, Claire!"

"Well, don't forget, if you ever *should*!" Claire pressed the electric button and jumped up. "Here we are!"

They rattled down the stairway, hurried across the

street, and, passing under a glass and iron marquee, entered, after Jamie had left his hat at the door, a spacious room carpeted with Turkish rugs and furnished with luxurious chairs and sofas, where a throng of men and women were standing and sitting about, looking at one another's clothes, while waiting the arrival of other men and women with whom they had appointments.

Claire and Jamie, having appointments with no one, made for the door leading to the restaurant, and were about to go in when they were met by a head waiter who advanced with an interrogative air and informed them that it would be necessary to wait for a few moments, as all the tables were taken. Other people were waiting, too, but as Claire and Jamie stepped back, an extremely pretty girl, well-rouged and powdered, accompanied by a young man, entered the restaurant, disappearing quickly among the tables under the guidance of another waiter who was evidently escorting her to a place already engaged. The girl wore a low hat with a broad brim, a wide collar of sable across her shoulders in spite of the warmth of the day, a noticeably short skirt, very thin silk stockings, and very high-heeled patent-leather slippers with glittering buckles. The height of her heels made her look as if she were walking on tiptoe, and the tilt they gave her body, thrusting it forward at the hips, produced a peculiar mincing and exaggeratedly feminine gait. As she hurried past Claire and Jamie, she gave them an almost imperceptible nod accompanied by a smile of fixed and artificial sweetness.



A sound indicative of irritation escaped Jamie, and he exclaimed under his breath:

"Helena looks more like a chorus girl every day!"


"She's awfully pretty, Jamie!"

"So are chorus girls! They've got to be! That's their business, but there's no reason why *Helena* should rouge and show her legs!"

"Excepting that it's the thing to do!"

"Is it? Well, if it's the thing to do, trust Helena to do it!" And as Claire had started forward in response to a signal from the head waiter, he followed her to a small table by a window overlooking Fifth Avenue.

They ordered their luncheon quickly and Claire, leaning back in her chair, looked about her at the occupants of the room. The women, irrespective of age, were all dressed in almost precisely the same way, and were almost all good-looking. Of the men the younger could be divided quickly into two classes, one hard-featured, the other inefficient; but the characteristics of the older ones were less marked, age, and habits of opulence having worn them more or less into a general resemblance. All, both men and women, were eating, drinking, or smoking exactly what they wished, with an air of indifference which seemed to say to the waiters and to each other, "You see it does n't matter in the least what we eat, drink, or smoke, because we are so well off we do not have to consider such things." Plainly, all these people lived lives of luxury, or wanted to, or tried to, or endeavored to convey the impression that they did.



With almost all one would say, looking at them, such living was a cult, and on the faces of many was stamped the conscious pride of material possessions.

It struck Claire that she, Jamie, and all the rest resembled members of some very expensive entomological species shut into a large and beautifully gilded box.

"Well, here we are eating and drinking just if nothing out of the common had been happening in the last four years. What are you smiling at, Claire?" said Jamie.

"I was thinking how funny we would all look, sitting about in this lordly way, being waited on by other very obsequious people, in black tail coats, to some thoroughly detached person who was n't used to our customs!"

"It *is* rather ludicrous when you come to think of it," responded Jamie with a chuckle. "Do you know, that sounded like Mallette, although I don't believe Mallette would think it was funny!"

"Why not?" asked Claire.


"He does n't like most rich people."

"Why?" repeated Claire in surprise.

"He says they've no right to exist unless they can give good reasons."

"What nonsense!"

"Well, you should hear him talk. There's something *in* what he says! It's the war. It's made him rather savage about some things."



"You seem thoroughly mad about him, Jamie. And such a name! Mallette! What's his first name?"

"Felix!"

Claire laughed joyously, principally because she was happy, and longed to laugh, no matter at what.

"Felix Mallette! What a combination!"

"You *must* meet him, Claire."

"But when? Where? That's the second time you've said so!"

Brought face to face with a definite challenge, Jamie hesitated, finally saying:

"The trouble is he does n't like meeting people!"

"Ask him to tea, or to dinner. I'm simply dying to know an actor!"

"I have, but he won't come!"


"Then I'm afraid we'll have to give him up, Jamie, if he's so difficult! Perhaps he does n't like meeting people, unless he thinks they're distinctly worth while! If that's the case, introduce him to Helena."

"Oh, Helena would n't think *him* worth while; besides they'd hate each other!" answered Jamie. "And he's the last man in the world to care about that kind of thing!"

He occupied himself with luncheon for a moment, and then remarked: "But I do wish Uncle Edward would sell our house, so that we could move farther uptown!"

"So that we might be more worth while?"

"Well, of course that sort of thing is rot really, but if we *did* live uptown instead of in Ninth Street, and



went about more, you'd see how soon Helena and Aunt Adelaide would be coming around. Because, you know after all, we've been making money too."

"And you expect Aunt Caroline to go to all that trouble just to get into their good graces!" cried Claire indignantly.

"Of course not!" answered Jamie. "Who cares about Helena or Aunt Adelaide! But we are awfully out of it down there! You are too, Claire, and you're too pretty to be buried! Somehow everything seems to be moving faster and faster. Everybody got so used to speeding up during the war that they can't stop. We ought to speed up a bit too."

"And if we did, you'd be the very last person to change your habits, Jamie! You'd spend your time composing, and playing about with your Bohemian friends, just as you've always done!"

"Oh, I wouldn't expect to be quite the guiding hand," Jamie answered cheerfully. "But if anybody took the lead, I'd follow! It's funny that George has never wanted to break away!"

"George has his own ideas about what's worth while!" replied Claire. "And as for expecting poor Aunt Caroline and Uncle Edward to change now!"

"I didn't really," answered Jamie. "Know who that is, Claire?" And he indicated a tall, slender, pale youth wearing a low English collar, who was engaged in swallowing oysters — his Adam's apple gliding quickly up and down — whilst a short blond waiter watched him

as if fascinated. "That's Brockbank. They say his income is a million a year!"

"What does he do with it, Jamie?"

"Spends it, of course, the way I spend my two thousand! Do you think he looks as if he liked music, Claire?"

"No, do you?"

"No, his tastes run to more material things. He stands for money, just as Helena does."

"What else can you expect of Helena? She never hears about anything else! Since the war it's worse than ever."

"Neither do we, Claire!"

"Oh, yes, we do, Jamie!"


"We don't, Claire!" answered Jamie firmly. "And if it had n't been for mother, we'd be just the same as all the others. She had something different in her. George is a throwback, all Nicholson, and yet there's something different about George, too!"

"You mean in his way of doing what he does?"

"Yes; he has better taste than any of the older ones. That's mother! They never approved of her exactly. She was what Aunt Caroline always calls, sarcastically, 'artistic.' They despise that sort of thing!"

"Don't be too critical, Jamie. We owe them so much!"

"They owe us things they never pay! Who's going to pay us for winning the war, for instance? We did n't start it. The older generation started it and got us to fight it out for them. I'm speaking generally mind you."



I ought to be different from what I am, and Helena ought to be too, and so many of us, but it is n't our fault really!"

"Why Jamie, you're sweet!" exclaimed Claire.

"Am I?" responded Jamie ironically with an expression new to Claire. "I'm not, but it's their fault. They say that we — the younger generation — are selfish. So is the older one — and they've got the whip hand of us!"

"You mean that their responsibility is greater than ours?"

"Yes, and they don't live up to it! Well, I don't care!" Jamie concluded with finality. "It's time we started. We must n't miss this new Frenchman's symphony. He's twenty-three — one of us!"


"You're blue, Jamie!" and Jamie noticed with compunction Claire's grave face.

"I'm not! I've been talking nonsense. I think I'll just have a cognac and then we'll start. Let's take a taxi! My treat!"

Jamie drank his cognac while Claire paid the bill, and they started out, passing Helena's table and receiving the same fixed and artificial smile accompanied by an almost imperceptible gesture of farewell.

"Blot!" remarked Jamie in an undertone, which signified derision and disapproval.

"You are n't really blue, Jamie?" asked Claire when their taxi, after turning into the Avenue, had fairly started uptown.



“Not a bit! I’m sorry I made you think so. But I’m crazy to hear this new Frenchman’s symphony. I say, Claire, if the family ever *should* break up for any reason, let’s you and I live together somewhere! Don’t you think it would be nice?”

“Just lovely, Jamie! I’d like to do it now, but of course Uncle Edward would n’t let us!”


“There you are! Why should Uncle Edward be able to dictate to us? We’re of age!”

“But we could n’t, anyway. It would be like deserting them.”

Jamie paid for the taxi and they found themselves presently in the huge interior of Carnegie, where, amid a pervading odor of damp kid gloves, people were filing down the aisles, ushers were violently letting down chair seats, and a cacophony of discordant sounds was rising from the stage. Claire and Jamie, whose seats were about in the center of the house, sidled in and, preparing themselves with luxurious deliberation, finally sank into them. Claire, after a moment of slight hesitancy, felt in the pocket of her coat and held a hand out toward Jamie in the palm of which rested a chocolate bon-bon. Jamie smiled and declined. Claire hesitated again, and then, unable to resist a school-girl inclination, thrust it furtively into her mouth. The conductor appeared, making his way rapidly between the rows of seated musicians and stepped upon his platform. A vigorous patter of applause sounded. The conductor

bowed, thereby dislodging certain long locks which fell over his forehead, restored them to their place by a practiced toss of the head, seized his baton and tapped with it the metal frame of his music-stand. He waited a moment, and then identically with the upward sweep of his arms — a gesture which welded into one entity all that diverse swarm — the mellifluous tootling of a flute arose, a breath of spring moved the strings of the violins, and some instrument of percussion, strange to Claire, produced the sound of a sudden rush of small, buoyant, and startled hoofs galloping swiftly, hoofs of deer or centaur. Claire and Jamie, glancing at one another, sank back still more luxuriously, their muscles relaxed, and, yielding themselves like floating swimmers, they gave themselves up to the intricate currents of the Frenchman's fantasia.

Claire closed her eyes and let the flood sweep over her. Emotions soft and intensely sweet caused her to smile — inclined her almost to tears. How sweet life was once more — how sweet the world — how doubly sweet, sitting beside her darling Jamie in this flood of harmonious sound knowing that the war was over, and that spring had come. And before her eyes there rose a picture of the Avenue as she had seen it on that day, six months earlier, when the first mistaken message had come that hostilities had ceased. She and Jamie had been on it together and had taken part in that extraordinary display of spontaneous happiness when there had seemed to her about the looks and ac-



tions of all classes an admirable sweetness and exaltation which had lifted her up with an immense sense of love and sympathy as if the brotherhood of man had become a living thing.

The symphony, which, without pauses between its separate movements, flowed on with unfailing resourcefulness, bearing with it, without effort, all those assembled identities, began to sink away, dying back into the first faint breath the violins had sounded. The flute tootled solitarily once more — stopped — and the long locks of the conductor — trained to do so — fell once more across his forehead. An immense and prolonged wave of applause filled the auditorium.

“By Jove! That was fine!” exclaimed Jamie.

“Heavenly!” assented Claire.

“But these Frenchmen are so ingenious. Is it a work of inspiration, or just mere diabolical cleverness?”

“I’m not going to bother to find out!” answered Claire. “It gave me too much pleasure. Jamie, you *must* go abroad and study!”

Jamie’s face fell. “If I only could Claire — but it’s no use, I’m afraid.” He was craning his neck to look down a diagonal alley formed by the heads, necks, and shoulders of the people in front. “By Jove!” he exclaimed, recovering his cheerfulness, “If there is n’t — no — yes, it is!”

“Who?” asked Claire.

“Mallette!”

“Really! Where?”

"Look straight through here until you see an English profile! See it? What do you think of him?"

"He's rather nice-looking, Jamie, but I expect that he will be like all the others. The kind which has light brown curling hair, good thin features, and patronizing manners!"

"Mallette's not like that!" said Jamie. "He's absolutely free from side."


"Then perhaps I shall like him. Oh, a Strauss waltz! How lovely!" And forgetting Mallette they lapsed into silence again.

But as they were going out they met Mallette.

He was standing in the vestibule, looking about him for no reason apparently, beyond that of idle curiosity. Jamie went up to him, exclaiming, "Hello, Mallette! I want you to meet my sister!" And during that moment Claire took stock of him.

She saw a man of medium height, with curling light brown hair carefully brushed and a courageous mouth which displayed white teeth when he greeted Jamie. He had the fine and yet strong look which very well bred men of all countries often have, but what attracted her particularly were his hazel eyes which demanded and fixed her attention with a steady look of smiling welcome as if they were forever engaged in searching out, meeting and greeting the facts of life as they advanced toward him, in whatever shape or of whatever promise they might reveal themselves.

Claire thought that she might like him, but for



some reason wondered, she could not have told why, if he were erratic, principally perhaps because he was a friend of Jamie's. Jamie *did* have some rather queer friends — nothing against them that she knew of — just perhaps unconventional and jolly. There was such a thing as being too jolly it seemed.

Mallette proved to have an agreeable English voice and pleasant manners when Jamie introduced him, and they stood for a time in the vestibule, but as they were being continually bumped into by the stream of people which was still pouring out of the auditorium, he finally invited them to have a cup of tea with him, and guiding them around the corner, descended into a small dingy basement tea-shop.

Claire reflected that most of the young men she knew would have apologized for its not being the Ritz, but Mallette said nothing beyond remarking that you could get very good scones there.

Tea ordered, they discussed the concert. Jamie had come to the conclusion that the symphony was a work of genius, but Mallette disagreed.

"Mere tricks of harmonics, I think," he said. "It pleased you because it was novel, but it would bore you to tears if you heard it three times running. Don't you think so, Miss Nicholson?"

"I'm afraid I don't!" answered Claire. "But then I love music so much, I am not very critical about it!"

"And the less you love it, the more critical you're inclined to be!" said Jamie. "That's Mallette. He



says the only modern German composition worth listening to is 'The Rosenkavelier'!"

"I don't gloat over the fact. I regret it," answered Mallette, smiling.

"And what about Wagner?"

"He simply makes me most awfully ill! A rank flower whose touch is poison!"

"What rot!" cried Jamie, and Claire, who was shocked by such heresy and yet who somehow understood him, exclaimed:

"I know what you mean. I can see that it *might* affect one that way."

"It does, unless you carry your own antidote for it. Perhaps I don't."

"And the Russians!" Jamie demanded almost threateningly.


"I like them, but they're all dead except a few very advanced composers who don't write music at all. The world was changing fast during the last ten years before the war and not for the better!"

"Ah!" said Claire. "And all during the day I have been thinking how beautiful it is once more!"

"Nature's world, yes," answered Mallette. "But I was thinking of Man's!"

"So was I," said Claire.

Mallette said: "Really! I'm afraid I can't agree with you. It's a very curious thing, but something *had* been going wrong with the arts before the war. They had grown, if not faltering, confused, as if something



terrible was approaching, and as if they were groping blindly to find means for the expression of terrific and unheard-of things. As if even art might not be *able* to express them. But still they groped, trying new roads, which led nowhere, waiting for that something which they felt was coming. It's rather curious! Whether it is just an idea of mine or not, I don't know, but there have been times in history, you know, during great crises, when the arts have gone by the board."

"You mean during wars?" asked Claire.

"In the past, yes. I think that a kind of unrealized consciousness that something was hanging over us affected our usual modes of expression."

"But now that it is over things will be as they were," Claire said. "Our dear old-fashioned world?"

"The old-fashioned part of it is doomed, I'm afraid, unless it changes itself. Do you really find it beautiful?"

"Yes," Claire answered.

"I should like to see what your world is like sometime!" said Mallette, smiling again.

"It consists of an uncle," Jamie interposed, "two aunts, two brothers, three Irish maids, and an old-fashioned house in Ninth Street! Come down any time and take a look at it!"


"You don't mind, Claire?" Jamie asked, a little later, when all three stood outside the tea-shop.

"Please go," answered Claire. "I want to walk and

if you come with me you'll want to ride. Good-night, Mr. Mallette! Will you be home to dinner, Jamie?"

"Not sure," replied Jamie. "I'll telephone."

Claire started through the cross-street for the Avenue, thinking for a moment about Mallette. He had n't said very much — excepting the usual small talk — beyond what has been recorded, but it seemed to her that what he *had* said might have easily led to the pronouncement of advanced ideas. She was not used to abstract discussions of any kind, and Mallette's remarks — which Jamie, she noticed, took as a matter of course — surprised and slightly interested her. He talked cleverly and she thought she would like to hear more of it, but about the world in general he must be wrong. It must be that humanity turning, sobered and sick, from all these years of fighting, would seek other paths, paths of peace and amity. That the world of her childhood as it existed before 1914 as she saw it dimly through the turmoil of the past, would grow bright once more, serene and buoyant. And turning into the Avenue she forgot Mallette and her cogitations. She was only twenty and Mallette's abstractions, or any one else's, could not hold her attention long. She began wondering what they were going to have for dinner, who Helena's dressmaker was, and whether Particolor, her Pekinese, was beginning to be worried about her. The slight exaltation which had possessed her during the concert, and for a little while before, had left her, but she was very happy, and as she pressed steadily down the



Avenue she looked very handsome. She was tall. All the Nicholsons — with the exception of Edward Nicholson — were good-looking, the women large and the men inclined to be small, and all — with the exception of Edward Nicholson — were well made; and she attracted many an eye as she pressed buoyantly on.

She let herself in. Particolar was waiting for her on the other side of the door, as she knew he would be, and they ran up the two flights together. The Nicholsons had never had electricity put in, and the gas-jets, one in each hall, were burning dimly.

Claire went into her room, the large one next Jamie's smaller one, and as she threw open the windows a half forgotten accession of sound attracted her attention. All the windows of all the tenements, whose rear walls faced her across the back yards, and which had been tightly shut for many months, were open, and a sound of voices and of various human activities welled out toward her.

Claire laughed. During the whole winter, she had seen or heard nothing of them. It was exactly as if the breath of spring had waked them, and as if they had resumed at once the occupations they had been engaged in when the frosts of the previous autumn had put them all to sleep.

CHAPTER II

HARDLY had Claire's door shut, when the telephone in the lower hall sounded, and Jamie — when Maggie, the waitress, had taken down the receiver — announced over it that he was bringing a friend home to dinner. George had telephoned similar information a few minutes before, and was at that moment in the Brevoort, treating his guest to a cocktail — cocktails being unknown in the Nicholson *ménage*.

Maggie, whose duties embraced those of parlor maid and waitress, hung up the receiver, and as it was seven o'clock, the time at which the gas-jet in the front hall must be increased in volume, she took an instrument from her pantry — a length of small brass tubing containing a wax taper, which had in addition a piece of cleft metal at one end and a wooden handle at the other, and went into the hall. Lifting the instrument above her head until the cleft end enclosed the key of the gas-jet, she performed the operation commonly known as turning up the gas. As she was so engaged, a latchkey rattled in the lock of the front door, the door opened, and Edward Nicholson entered.

Edward Nicholson — who was undersized — had a large bald head, heavy white moustaches, very short, thick legs, and a pot belly. He was the unhandsome member of the family. Maggie, a buxom woman of forty,

with a bosom of excessive development, stood with her arms still extended, but with her eyes fixed stoically on Edward Nicholson. Edward Nicholson glanced at Maggie's bosom, from habit, but coldly, and said in an impersonal tone, as he began to mount the stairs:

"Good-evening, Maggie!"

"Good evening, sir!"

Twenty years before, when Maggie was a fresh young Irish girl of twenty, that same bosom had roused many amorous longings in Edward Nicholson, and although through natural caution he had guarded even his glances, Maggie had been perfectly aware of his prepossession, and so, too, to a degree, had his sisters, but that was twenty years ago, before Caroline and Kate had begun to harbor dark suspicions that their brother was leading what is called a double life.

Maggie, with her stolid air, went into the parlor carrying the instrument for turning up the gas with her. She still hoped, some day, to surprise Edward Nicholson in one more amorous glance. Maggie was a good girl and a good Catholic, and if Edward Nicholson had had the temerity to make advances twenty years before, or even to-day, she would have repulsed him sharply. Nevertheless, those long-past furtive appraisals of his had not been distasteful to her.


Maggie lighted two of the burners of the six in the large chandelier in the parlor, a light on each side of the mantelpiece, a light on either side of the doorway leading to the library, and a light in the wall opposite the

mantelpiece and near one of the front windows. This light seemed to illuminate the music-rack of the grand piano, to the accompaniment of which Aunt Kate in a husky voice occasionally murdered the celebrated contralto aria from "Samson and Delilah." All these lights were enclosed in old-fashioned globes of clear glass with designs of rather elegant scrollwork etched on them. They were hard to get now, being considered old-fashioned and out of date, and Caroline could replace broken ones only by picking one up occasionally, here and there, in second-hand furniture shops, in conservative gas-fixture establishments, or in the warerooms of auctioneers.

After lighting the gas-jets, Maggie lighted two oil lamps, with silk shades, one of which stood on a small table at the left of the fireplace, and one on the small end of the grand piano.

Under this illumination the Nicholsons' parlor stood revealed.

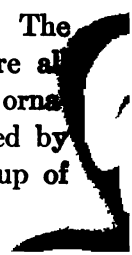
It produced a Victorian impression of comfort, notwithstanding the atrocious character of most of its contents. A mirror with a rococo gilt frame filled the entire space between the front windows, as it did at one time in ten thousand New York houses. The frame of the mirror branched out at the top forming two gilt cornices from which the window curtains were suspended. In the Nicholson parlor these were of old red damask. This damask had been purchased in Paris, forty years before, by Grandfather and Grandmother Nicholson, on



the occasion of their only visit there, and had originally covered the parlor furniture as well, but the damask which had been used on the furniture had been replaced many times since, each time with as close a match to the original as could be procured, but each time departing farther and farther from it. Another mirror with a gilt frame of a debased rococo style surmounted the mantelpiece, which was of white marble, also rococo, but of a style even more debased than that of the mirror frames. The doors were of good, handsome mahogany surrounded by heavy mouldings.

The effect of the doors, the gilt frames, the plain gray-painted walls, and the crimson damask curtains, was not bad, but certain things in the room led one to believe that the harmony of the effect was quite accidental and that the taste of the Nicholsons left much to be desired.

For one thing, the pictures were distressing. On one wall hung a large flower piece, also the result of the Paris trip, of an extremely mediocre character, which Kate Nicholson was in the habit of showing to visitors with pride, announcing in a final sort of way that it was the work of Neolini. No visitor had ever heard of Neolini before, nor had Kate, nor anybody else; but for the mere reason that he had not been heard of, the mention of his name almost always produced an impression. The other pictures, which, with the flower piece, were all framed in gilt mouldings of excessive depth and ornamentation, had all unmistakably been purchased by people who should not purchase pictures: a group of



Neapolitan peasants; the Favorite of the Harem — properly clothed, of course; the Little Bootblack; the Broken Pitcher — not Greuze — and a few landscapes of impossible Alpine scenery.

In one corner, on a pedestal of onyx, stood a bronze bust of a young lady holding two cherries between her lips, the cherries being colored to imitate nature — this had been purchased as a Christmas gift for Caroline by Edward, who had thereby established himself as a connoisseur of art in the eyes of almost all the Nicholsons — and against one wall an Eastlake *étagère* of black wood, engraved with lines of gold, displayed various objects of art which the Nicholsons cherished: a mosaic of the Coliseum at Rome, a collection of souvenir spoons, two photograph albums, a set of mother-of-pearl shells on which were painted a series of ideal heads, and a Swiss music-box.

The furniture consisted of a rosewood “parlor set,” with three or four later additions of the saddle-bag variety.

The room had formerly been carpeted, but this was now abolished, and a hardwood floor had been laid down on which were placed a few expensive but very ugly Eastern rugs.

Passing through the folding doors, Maggie proceeded next to illuminate what had formerly been the dining-room. Through a strange outburst of extravagance on Edward Nicholson’s part, some ten years before, a dining-room had been added to the rear of the house, and

the former dining-room had been turned into what the family called the library.


In both of these rooms, the parlor and the library, the not inelegant original character of the rooms themselves had served to mitigate the liberties which the Nicholsons had taken with them, but it was in the dining-room that one could see the Nicholson preferences naïvely displayed. The room was paneled up to a height of six feet in oak, finished a particularly vile yellowish color, the walls above being hung with a paper designed to look like tapestry. The ceiling was also of oak, but the six central panels had at first formed a skylight glazed with a design in bright-colored glass. This glass produced a glare at breakfast and luncheon, so violent that it was too much even for Edward, Caroline, and Kate, and after two years the skylight openings had been filled in to match the rest of the ceiling. Claire could remember distinctly seeing the assembled family decorated with a variety of colors as they sat at table. Jamie's face bathed in a ghastly green, a patch of scarlet running about over Aunt Caroline, and Edward's head transformed into a purple dome.

The furniture of light oak, which matched the paneling, was heavily carved, and a rug, whose colors rivaled those of the skylight, covered the floor.

Maggie, after turning up the gas in the library where it needed turning up, and lighting other burners according to the fixed habits of the house, shut herself into the dining-room. At that moment the front door opened


once more. This time it admitted George and his guest, both smelling slightly of cloves. They hung their hats on the hat-rack and ascended to George's room. Almost immediately, Aunt Kate came in. She, too, had been to the concert at Carnegie, but, being very greedy, had stopped for a solitary orgy of cakes and chocolate at Maillard's. As Caroline was already at home the entire household was now assembled with the exception of Jamie.

Kate Nicholson's door had just closed on the third floor, when Edward began to descend the stairs as hurriedly as his figure permitted, glancing toward the marble top of the hall hat-rack. Observing from halfway up that the evening paper lay on it, he adopted a more leisurely pace for the remainder of the descent, and, picking up the paper, made his way into the library with it. It was the unwritten rule of the house that neither Edward, Caroline, nor Kate might carry it up to their rooms when they came in, but that the first to descend later was to enjoy it undisturbed. If Caroline secured it first, she seemed to Edward to keep it an unconscionable time, while if Edward had it it sometimes seemed to Caroline that he must be pretending to read it long after he had actually finished. Kate, who through her unconquerable lethargy was always late everywhere, never got it until after the other two had had it, when her immersion in it would last during the remainder of the evening. The result of this arrangement was that two people — Claire, George, and Jamie did n't count — were al-



ways waiting disconsolately about for a chance to get hold of it. This complication, which arose every evening, could have been immediately done away with if three evening papers had been taken instead of one, but as most people take only one, the taking of three would have required a daring type of mind which did not exist in the Nicholson family. On second thought it is doubtful whether this idea would have served any good purpose, for it is not likely that the three evening papers would have been the same, and if they had been different, it is probable that Edward, Caroline, and Kate would each have insisted on reading all of them, thereby simply trebling the difficulties of the situation as it existed already.

Edward Nicholson seated himself in his favorite chair, which was placed directly underneath the chandelier, glanced at the Wall Street page, and then, searching through the remainder of the paper until he found the announcement of the failure of a large firm of rival button manufacturers, he settled himself solidly and began to read. He read almost furtively, grasping the paper firmly by both hands as if ready to crumple it together, at a moment's notice, but he had just become absorbed in the newspaper's account of the catastrophe, when a preliminary loud bang sounded on the grand piano in the parlor and some one swung into a waltz. Edward rose impatiently and was about to close the doors between the parlor and the library, when he desisted, seeing that Jamie had a guest, who, seated on a small chair,



was listening as a guest, to Jamie's performance with a polite attention he might not otherwise have afforded it. They had just come in, but Edward, immersed in the paper, had not heard them.

Edward returned to his chair, but almost immediately Caroline's loud, brusque tones sounded in the parlor, and at the same moment, glancing diagonally upward through the door leading into the back hall, he saw George and another masculine figure descending the stairs. He looked at his watch. It was later than he thought. In fact it was half-past seven, and as he slipped his watch back into his pocket, the sliding doors leading into the dining-room opened, and Maggie appeared to announce that dinner was served.

In the meantime Claire, in her room, which she loved, had not lighted the gas, and was sitting by the window in the fading light, with Particolor on her lap, in a low rocking-chair, looking at the windows of the tenement houses. She remembered some play where there had been a scene similar to it, a building showing its various occupants in rows of windows, one above the other, and this was just as fascinating. She heard the voices of women engaged in interminable dialogues, the rough tones of uneducated men, scraps of songs, laughter, the crying of infants, the hoarse conversations of the tenement children darting in and out, wild as hawks. From some place issued the sound of some small wood instrument, piping a few notes which reminded her of the mellifluous flute which had tootled in the Frenchman's symphony.

She tried to discover whence it came, but could not. The whole place teemed with, swarmed with life, and the city swarmed with it, and the whole world. Idly she asked herself what it meant, all these swarming millions. And how little she knew of it and of them. A few people here and there, a place or two, and only really well this house, only intimately her room, a tiny hollow cube lost in the immensity of the city, in the infinity of the world. She felt in her pocket, drew out a tiny box containing chocolate bonbons and, biting into one, stretched herself luxuriously, leaning far back in her chair. — Some day she would leave this room. Some day life would call to her and she would go out to meet it, but not yet — she was not ready.

The rasping of the dumb-waiter far below roused her. She could tell from the quality of the sounds it made that it was descending. This meant that Maggie was ready for the soup, and that she had at the most five minutes in which to dress for dinner. She sprang up, lighted the gas, unlaced and kicked off her shoes, undid her dress, washed, gave her hair a touch here and there, slipped into another dress which she could fasten quickly, drew on a pair of slippers, and ran downstairs. Maggie, in the doorway between the parlor and the library, was announcing dinner. Aunt Kate, for a wonder, had just preceded her, and George and Jamie were there, George with an unknown friend and Jamie with — Mallette.

Mallette's reappearance struck Claire, Jamie, and Mallette himself in a humorous light, and they exchanged

smiles. George's friend, brought up for introduction, shook hands with Claire with a grip so muscular that she felt glad that she had forgotten to put on her rings after washing her hands. He, too, was of medium height, but thickly built, with a longish head, a heavy chin, and light blue eyes. He seemed about thirty-eight or nine, much older than George, and his brownish hair was already touched with gray. He spoke with a strong and forceful voice. His name was Dudley Orville.

Claire was twenty, Jamie twenty-two, and George twenty-four. Jamie looked like no one else in the family, but between Claire and George, who were unmistakable Nicholsons, there was a strong resemblance. Claire was tall for a woman, George, for a man, slightly undersized. Claire was handsome, George extremely good-looking. Each had regular features, well-shaped heads, fine complexions, handsome eyes, and symmetrical bodies, but in George all these things were neat, compact, and small; in Claire they were vigorous and splendid.

As for Jamie, he had a long nose and a retreating forehead from which his black hair was always glossily brushed, a musicianly profile, a mouth which displayed his feelings too openly, sloping shoulders, a narrow chest, a thin body, and blue-gray eyes. He possessed undeniable charm, but not one of the Nicholsons understood him in the least excepting Claire.


When war broke out in 1914 Jamie disappeared. After a month a letter came from him in England. He

had enlisted there in an English regiment. He was sent to France, saw some heavy fighting for a month, contracted typhoid, and was discharged from the army after a period of convalescence in London.

George's army experience had been less extensive. He had gone to an officers' training camp on the United States' declaration of war, but had not been sent abroad.

There remain only the Nicholson sisters, Caroline and Kate. They also resembled each other and were both Nicholsons, but while Caroline had the bright Nicholson hair and the fresh Nicholson complexion, Kate's hair was dark and her complexion muddy. Their cast of features was similar, and each looked like Claire and George. Caroline was big, brusque, and hearty, a fine figure of energetic middle age. Kate was big, too, but while Caroline's manner was open, Kate's possessed the furtive characteristics of one who is prepossessed and guided by secret vices, Kate's being laziness and gluttony. Of all the Nicholsons living in this house, Kate's character was the most obscure. She was less frank, more impenetrable than the others, and colder even than Edward.

If the foregoing description of the Nicholson family and the Nicholson house has given the impression of anything in the least cheap or tawdry, it has failed of its purpose, because they and it were spotless, shining, and expensive. In the house nothing was ever allowed to deteriorate in the slightest degree. The paint was always fresh, the mahogany beautifully polished, the brasses



luminous. The taste of the objects which adorned the rooms might be found fault with, but the workmanship never. The Nicholsons always bought the best quality of everything and were willing to pay for it. If they had had a coat of arms, its motto might well have been, "The Best is the Cheapest," they repeated this axiom so often.


Their persons exemplified it. Caroline and Kate wore dresses not always of the latest fashion, but of the very best materials made in the most careful way, while diamonds and pearls of good size and of the very first quality flashed or slumbered on the carefully kept fingers of their large strong hands. Edward's clothing was conservative but solid; and the entire family evidently never dreamed of buying anything which was not of the best, a practice, the outcome, plainly, of a policy founded on traditions of good business logic.

Maggie, having announced dinner, retreated through the sliding doors between the dining-room and library, and Caroline followed, followed by the others. Edward was just rising from his chair, and a short pause ensued in the progress of the procession while Orville and Mallette were introduced to him. This ceremony concluded, everybody entered the dining-room, Edward leading and carrying the evening paper, which he folded up and slid under him as he sat down. This was to prevent its appropriation by anybody else before he had finished it. Maggie was waiting to begin operations, and as was always the case when there were guests, Annie, the chambermaid, had come upstairs to assist her.

Guests for dinner, brought in by Claire, George, or Jamie, were not infrequent at the Nicholsons', and with rare exceptions were the only kind who ever appeared there. Relatives were occasionally asked and friends of Caroline or Kate were invited at rare intervals, but the Nicholsons had never given a dinner party. Why the younger guests ever came was something of a mystery — unless it was to escape the tedium of their own houses — because the atmosphere of the Nicholson house was not enlivening. Caroline, without knowing much about them, liked to see young people about, but both Kate and Edward were completely indifferent to them, and it was the invariable custom for them, after the ordeal of dinner was over, to escape into the refuge of the bedroom of whoever had invited them. To-night, however, the atmosphere was slightly charged with the stimulating element of novelty.

This novelty was Mallette.

Only one foreigner — previous to Mallette's appearance — had ever been entertained in Edward Nicholson's house. Kate Nicholson had met a German count, some years before — two years before the war in fact — and had asked him to call. He had called constantly for a short time, had proposed to Kate and had been refused, so it was said, had tried to borrow money of Edward and had again been refused, and had disappeared. Soon afterwards he had been arrested as a swindler, and the newspapers had discovered that he was not a count at all, but the son of a small Berlin tailor. Although the Nicholsons



had enjoyed the German greatly, listening to his stories very much as they listened to the tales the foreign missionaries told in the lecture-room of their church, this experience strengthened the prejudice which they had always nourished against all foreigners, and it is doubtful if Mallette's reception would have been what it was had not the war, with its succession of foreign missions, the variety of strange uniforms seen in the streets, the sudden preponderance of foreign affairs in the newspapers, given a slight temporary cosmopolitan tinge to the conversation and thoughts of many Americans who before had hardly been conscious of Europe at all except as a place where immigrants came from. As it was, however, the moment Mallette's crisp English accent sounded, the Nicholsons — particularly the older ones — spruced themselves up a bit, so to speak, and prepared to display their company manners for his special benefit. In England, all Americans are probable millionaires, and in America it would not be impossible for an Englishman to appear who had aristocratic connections.

Edward sat at the head of the table, Caroline at the foot, Kate at Edward's right, Claire at his left, and the four young men between them and Caroline, two on each side. Edward always carved, and on asking guests which kind they would have, was always told that it did n't matter, which always irritated him, although he did n't show it; therefore, when Mallette, on being asked, told him exactly what he preferred, a slight sensation prevailed at the table for a moment, and it be-

came plain to the Nicholsons, because of Edward Nicholson's manner, that he approved of Mallette.

"Well, I see that Thwaites & Company have failed!" remarked George to Edward Nicholson as soon as they were seated.

"Well, well!" cut in Caroline. "Thwaites, eh? Such an old concern, too!"

"What's the trouble there, uncle?" asked George.

"War contracts," Edward answered briefly. The subject seemed distasteful to him.

"War contracts!" George repeated incredulously. "Fail over war contracts! — why, w — ahem," and he coughed hurriedly.

"It's too bad they could n't have waited a while!" observed Orville. "Munitions are shaky enough as it is!"


"They must have been a lot of idiots," George observed. "Fancy not being able to make money on a war contract!" He glanced at his uncle and as the latter did not respond, looked complacently at Orville.

"Some people seemed to think the war was going on forever," he continued, and Orville supplemented this by adding:

"Yes, there's always a time to get in and a time to get out."

"In and out of what?" Jamie inquired. He had not been listening.

"Everything of course, even bed; something you never seem to understand," George answered with brotherly brusqueness.




A laugh followed this sally while Jamie, unable to think of any immediate retort, made one of his inimitable pantomimic gestures indicating that George thought himself unduly clever. All of the Nicholsons had laughed, that is, excepting Edward, who, now slicing the roast beef as if it might have been a Prussian, remarked with a rancor surprising in one usually so self-contained: "They ended the war too soon."

"They certainly did," Caroline assented in her loud, positive voice. "They should never have stopped until they were in Berlin."

"But Aunt Caroline" — and what Claire said sounded almost heretical — "think how many more of our soldiers would have lost their lives!"

"I know," Caroline replied obstinately; "but the Germans have got to be made to feel sorry for what they've done and the only way you can do that is by giving them a thorough beating. You've got to make them repent!"

Claire was not sure that you could make people repent by beating them, but she was forced to speculate on the peculiar ferocity which had been displayed by the older Nicholsons during the war. Abstractly she could not blame them for feeling ferocious about the Germans because she felt that way herself, but the unescapable fact about their ferocity, which she could not share, was that the satisfaction the slaughter of Germans caused them was so keen that it made them quite indifferent to the fate of those who were slaughtering



them, and who, of course, were themselves being slaughtered in large numbers.

At this point, during a momentary pause, the English voice of Mallette rose distinctly. He seemed to have been asking Jamie a question or two in an undertone, and now he articulated clearly, as if repeating a word he had heard, but was not quite sure of —

“Buttons?”

Mallette's manner of pronouncing the word was so superior in its staccato clearness to the rather slurring American method, that it seemed to the Nicholsons as if his attitude toward the question of buttons in the abstract might be superior too. Jamie, who hated to talk about business or to hear it talked about, because he never understood it in the least, flushed, and answered in a low voice, which the table heard plainly:

“Yes, that's our business!”

“Our business!” cried George humorously. “Jamie, the button manufacturer!”

The elder Nicholsons laughed at this sally, and Caroline cried in her brusque way: “Now don't you make fun of Jamie! He's all right! Are n't you, Jamie?”

She smiled at Mallette as if inviting him to enjoy the family joke, too, but Mallette had caught Claire's expression of resentment over Jamie's confusion, and he diverted attention from him by remarking to Edward:

“Might I ask you how you create markets, sir, where there have been none before?”

“By creating a demand for what you have to sell.”

"By teaching a native, for instance, who has always tied his clothing with tapes, to use buttons instead?"

"As an illustration, that is as good as any other," answered Edward.

"Then in these days the supply must regulate the demand, and not the demand the supply."

Edward smiled tolerantly. "That was the old theory. In these days if you want to make more money, you must increase the volume of your business. You can't increase your profits."

"So that if you do a million dollars' worth of business a year and you want to double your profits, you must manage to convince enough people that they want buttons badly enough to make up another million dollars' worth!"

"Exactly!"

"That's jolly interesting!" remarked Mallette.


"You are not in business yourself?" asked Edward.

"Oh, no; I'm an actor!"

This announcement was received rather frostily, although Mallette seemed quite unconscious of the fact, and Claire saw George cast an equivocal leer at Orville which could not have failed offending Mallette if he had seen it. Kate, who had been eating heavily, and who had not yet spoken, now said:

"I see that there's an English lord acting in a play here. Do you know him?"

"Hazlewood?" answered Mallette. "Oh, yes, we were at school together!"



With the exception of Claire and Jamie, Mallette's assertion was received by the table with a silence which seemed to say, "Perhaps you did, and perhaps you did not, but anyway, we know what actors are like, and anything they may say must be taken with a grain of salt!" The knowledge that Mallette was an actor had gone far toward neutralizing the favorable impression his accent had produced; in fact, it seemed now as if that same accent might be one of any number of equivocal weapons deliberately assembled for one knew not what dubious purposes, and all became subtly aware that Edward's approval of him, for his prompt declaration as to whether he preferred it rare or well done, had been withdrawn.

"Do you know what I think, uncle, I think Thwaites & Company would be a good buy!" This from George, who talked and thought about business even more than any of the other Nicholsons, which is saying a good deal, after another meaning glance which, this time, Mallette noticed. Claire thought that George seemed to be trying to be deliberately rude to him.

"Not at all!" answered Edward. "There's nothing there. Their business has disappeared. You would be buying a number of buildings full of machinery and no customers to speak of!"

"This is the kind of thing we get every night!" Jamie whispered to Mallette. "It's the original game of 'Button! button! Who's got the button?' and they're playing it all the time! It's fierce!"


“Your uncle would n’t tell you whether he thought it would be a good speculation or not. You know how he treated me when he got that tip on Steel!”

Aunt Caroline uttered this in her loud, challenging voice, and the Nicholsons laughed again. It was a standing joke with them. Not long before Edward had bought steel on a reliable tip and was said to have done a good stroke of business. He did not tell any one, because no matter how willing he might be to talk about business in general, he never imparted any information concerning his own, and he did not approve of speculation, for women especially, but Caroline had accidentally learned what Edward was doing, had done likewise, and had never failed since to berate him when opportunity offered for not sharing his information with her.

“How’s copper, George?” she added.

“They say it’s going up! Don’t you want some, Aunt Kate?” And there was another laugh.

Aunt Kate was even more averse to speculation than Edward. What the Nicholsons called speculation being the purchase of stocks when they were low, locking them away, and selling them when they were high. The idea of buying any stock on margin was supposed to be unthinkable for any Nicholson excepting George. Kate, who was extremely close-fisted, was more secretive than any of the others, and it was believed that all the money she could save out of her income — which was derived from her shares in the Nicholson Button Company — was regularly invested in Government bonds.



CHAPTER III


DINNER being over, the party rose and made for the parlor with the exception of Edward, who disappeared down the basement stairs into the front basement room, which he used as a general retreat and sanctum. The only diversion at the command of the Nicholson *entourage* was the game known as "Five Hundred," and Caroline now proposed it for the young people with the passing thought that it would perhaps hardly appeal to so sophisticated a person as an actor, but Claire, Jamie, and George all hated it, and Claire, after a whispered word with Jamie said:

"I think we would rather have some music, Aunt Caroline; Jamie is going to play a waltz he is composing!"

"All right, Jamie; let's hear it!"

Caroline settled herself in an armchair beside the small table which held one of the lamps, and furtively slipping on a pair of spectacles, took up some needlework. Jamie went to the piano and struck into the waltz he had begun before dinner. Claire and Mallette took possession of a small sofa. Orville had seated himself politely beside Kate, and George had joined them.

Jamie began with the preliminary dashing chords, and then swung into the movement of the waltz, a creditable piece of the softly swaying, dreamful kind. He had




begun reluctantly because the presence of any member of the family, with the exception of Claire, made him diffident. He knew that all the things he cared for, they would either disapprove of or not understand, but as he played, Claire understood well that his spirit was waltzing to the time of his waltz. His narrow shoulders leaned forward, and as he pressed the pedals his whole body seemed to lift itself from the piano stool. At times his profile was bent toward the keys and again raised upward, while he swayed slightly from side to side. Claire knew that Jamie's soul was, for the moment, full of joy. Dear, dear Jamie!

Claire said, when he stopped, "That was sweet, Jamie!"

Caroline had disappeared, having remembered a moment before that she had forgotten to tell the cook that the salt cod she had ordered was for fish-cakes in the morning, and Kate, Orville, and George were absorbed in discussing the future of real estate in the Washington Square district. Jamie noticed this with relief. Claire and Mallette's sofa stood diagonally in front of the tall pier glass between the windows so that they and Jamie seemed quite by themselves.

"You like it, do you?" said Jamie. "I thought perhaps the last bar might be better if it went like this!" and he played it again. "You like it better the first way?" He played a scale or two, and then, after a slight pause, began something, a song apparently, which Claire did not know. It had an arresting quality



which instantly fixed her attention, and which caused her to sit silent for a moment after he had finished.

"What was that, Nicholson?" asked Mallette. "It's jolly good!"

"A little thing of mine!" answered Jamie. "Do you like it? I did n't think much of it!"

"Why, it's lovely!" cried Claire. "Simply lovely! Is it a song?"

"You know those poems of Dowson's you lent me." Jamie had turned to Mallette. "I've been trying my hand at setting some of them to music."

"What was the one you played just now?" Mallette asked.

Jamie answered, "Exchanges," and repeated the first verse:

"All that I had I brought,
Little enough, I know;
A poor rhyme roughly wrought,
A rose to match thy snow:
All that I had I brought."

"How lovely!" cried Claire. "Who is Dowson? I never heard of him!"

"He is known," answered Mallette, "but not largely. He loved a barmaid, who jilted him, and died of drink in a bricklayers' cottage near London. All this happened in that distant world which existed before the war."

"It sounds like the story of a real genius!" said Claire.

"It is," Mallette answered.

At that moment Kate's voice was heard addressing George's guest.

"You know, Mr. Orville, our family have been button manufacturers for three generations!"

Claire burst into an irrepressible peal of almost hysterical laughter, causing Kate, George, and Orville to turn quickly for a moment and then resume their conversation. A sudden and new sense of the complicated absurdities and tragedies of life had seized Claire. And this night it seemed about to begin to open out for *her*; about to begin, like some mysterious night-blooming flower, to tremble, its petals to quiver, as if on the verge of revealing itself, of disclosing things to her, grotesque, beautiful, and strange. She wished to say to Mallette, "How do you like my world?" but could not. Still, looking at him, she saw his lips curve with a slight quizzical turn which seemed to say, "You need n't ask because I understand." Jamie screened by the piano was making one of his inimitable grimaces, and suddenly, with a feeling of disloyalty in admitting Mallette even tacitly into too personal a partnership, her face grew grave again. Something about his foreign air and crisp speech had caused the background of her own life to assume a different aspect, blurred, old, and a little dull, and for this she was sorry and even a little resentful. Presently Mallette said something which made her doubt the construction she had placed on that quizzical look of his.

"I like your world!"



"Why?"

"Because it reminds me of home, and the sort of thing I have n't had much of of late years. Have you been in England?"

"Never. Does *this* remind you of England?"

"Not so much in the way it looks as in the impression it gives one of something very settled. I did n't know that families like yours existed over here!"

"Don't you know people here?" asked Claire.

"A few. One house I have been to is a palace only lately finished. Every effort has been made to conceal this fact with old furniture and with surfaces stained to simulate age, but still there's something so brand-new about it, the house, the servants, and the people themselves, that one doubts if it can be permanent. I should n't be surprised at any time, on going there, to find that the furniture had disappeared and that the family had returned to the obscurity of Harlem or some such place. Do you know the type? But I suppose you don't!"

"Oh, yes, I do. They are everywhere!"

Mallette seemed to hesitate for a moment and then said:

"I've met Mr. Orville there and your brother. They don't remember me."

"Do tell me who they are!"

"A Mrs. Hampton and her daughter."

"On Sixty-Eighth Street?"

"Yes."



"My aunt and cousin," said Claire.

Mallette flushed. "Oh, I say, Miss Nicholson, I'm sorry! They are n't really like that! I simply hit upon them to illustrate what we were talking about and exaggerated frightfully!"

"I know you did. They really are n't like that, but any one might think so. They're very fashionable. Jamie! Mr. Mallette knows Helena!"

"I know it," answered Jamie. "I heard you. And you met George there? Funny he did n't mention it!"

Kate had said good-night, and as the stairs had creaked under the weight of Edward and Caroline, on their way to their rooms, George and Orville now lighted cigars. George produced them. He offered one, not very cordially, to Mallette, who declined, and returned the case to his pocket. Jamie grimaced again, and said:

"Much obliged, but I don't think I will!"

"I don't either!" retorted George. "You've got cigars of your own!"

"Indeed, I have!"

Jamie drew two enormous ones from his pocket, offered one to Mallette, who declined again, got up and lighted the other ostentatiously, shut the door to the hall, and, returning to the piano, puffing out clouds of smoke, began to play noisily.

"Don't do that!" said George. "You'll have uncle down here in a minute!"

Jamie swung into his waltz again, swaying to and

fro, exaggerating the time and playing softly for the most part, but changing every now and then unexpectedly to the loud pedal with irritating emphasis, as, holding his cigar in the corner of his mouth, he looked steadily at George.

"Don't, Jamie!" cried Claire, but Jamie would not heed her. She and Mallette had got up at her suggestion and joined George and Orville. They tried to talk, but Jamie's provocative manner of playing made it impossible, and presently George said coldly, he never outwardly lost his temper, "If you don't stop that, I'll make you!"

Mallette exclaimed, "For Heaven's sake, Nicholson, you're getting on our nerves!" and Claire cried again, "Don't, Jamie, *please!*"

Jamie took his cigar from his mouth and began a kind of droning recitative, drumming an accompaniment with two fingers.

"Button, button, who's got the button? Who talks buttons, thinks buttons, dreams buttons, would eat buttons if he could? Who does n't know anything except buttons? Whose head is a but—"

He ducked to avoid a book which George, with perfect calmness, had launched at him. The book having missed its mark, George followed it, but was stopped by Orville, who, deftly seizing his wrist, jerked him into a chair. Jamie was about to resume his recitative, when Claire threw her arms around him.

"All right, I'll stop, Claire!" And as she released



him he got up, threw his cigar into the fireplace, and faced George.

"Do you know what you are? You're a cad, and so is your friend. You've met Mallette before, at Aunt Adelaide's, and you did n't have manners enough to say so!"

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed Mallette sharply. "We'll drop that, if you please!"

"No, we won't!" cried Jamie obstinately.

"It's no concern of yours!" said George.

"Do you deny it?"

"I say it does n't concern you!"

"Do you deny it?" George did not answer, and Jamie turned to Orville. "Do you?"

Orville was plainly far from comfortable, but Mallette relieved the situation by saying, "Really, Nicholson, you're making an ass of yourself! Good-night, Miss Nicholson!" and he held out his hand.

Claire saw that he had flushed again. She took it, saying deliberately, "Good-night, Mr. Mallette! Won't you come in some afternoon when these quarrelsome boys are n't here?"

"Wait a minute!" Jamie cried. "I'm coming too!" and he followed Mallette, who, after bowing to George and Orville, had gone into the hall. The front door closed with a slam, plainly Jamie's doing.

"What on earth did you ask him to call for, Claire?" said George at once. "I did my best to make it plain that he was n't wanted!"

"What do you mean? Do you know anything against him?" Claire demanded resentfully.

"Well, dammit, he's an actor! That's enough, is n't it?"

"Helena knows him!"

"*Does* she! Lord Hazelwood happened to take him to call. That's how *he* got there! She'll probably drop him as soon as she decently can! Besides, we've had enough of the English for a while. They got us over there to help them out and then thought it the clever thing to guy us, so everybody says."

"How *could* you! How *could* you treat any one like that! In your own house!"

Claire, without even a glance at Orville, left the parlor abruptly, ran upstairs and locked her door. Particolor, who slept in the lower regions, had been taken down by Katie. The gas was burning dimly and she seated herself once more by the window.

Poor Jamie! Something like that was always happening! Something would irritate him and he would become, suddenly, obstinate, unreasonable, and angry. Things upset him so! George's rudeness to Mallette was of course unpardonable, but it was unpardonable of Jamie to call attention to it in Mallette's presence. Jamie, of course, had resented George's making fun of him at the dinner table, and had, without considering Mallette, seized the first opportunity to quarrel with him. Why could n't George let him alone! He was always rubbing him the wrong way, as indeed were the others, although

Edward, Caroline, and Kate often seemed to do so without realizing it. Poor Jamie! He did n't belong to them! His restless, fitful spirit, hopelessly restless since his life in the army, fluttering and fitful as the flight of a swallow, chafed behind the rigid bars of their humdrum existence. Jamie loved so much to be happy and was often wretched because he could not be happy enough. And George apparently was in the habit of going to Aunt Adelaide's! He had never mentioned it. How annoying that kind of unnecessary secretiveness or lack of frankness!

Claire's head had hardly touched the pillow when she slept, but very late — during those hours in the night when the city has moments of complete stillness — she found herself wide awake, listening. The house was silent, but she was vividly certain that she had been awakened by some sound, and, raising herself on one elbow, she still listened, hardly breathing.

Yes! There it was; a stealthy step on the stairs and the creak of the banisters! Presently some one brushed past her door, she heard a deep breath or two, and Jamie's door was softly closed. This was followed by a thick, muttered exclamation, and the sound of a weight of some sort, dropping heavily on Jamie's bed. Was he ill? She started up and, getting out onto the floor, stood by the door which opened between her room and his. This door was not used. In fact Jamie's chest of drawers stood against it on the other side, but through it she could hear more plainly, and presently a kind of

thick, strange sob startled her. She hastily lighted the gas, thrust her feet into her bedroom slippers, drew on one of those filmy, fanciful things which women have christened "negligees," and, stepping quickly but cautiously into the hall, she opened his door.

Mallette stood by the bed with his hat on, looking down at Jamie, who was lying on it apparently unconscious. He turned as she opened the door, started, and hastily removed his hat. Claire was staring at Jamie in terror.

"What — !" she began, but was warned by a hurried gesture from Mallette, who, stepping quickly past her, closed the door.

"What is it, Mr. Mallette! Has he been hurt?"


Mallette looked at her closely and answered in a whisper, "He is ill! He will be all right presently!"

"But he is unconscious! I'll wake Aunt Caroline and telephone for the doctor!"

"No, no, please. He will be all right in the morning; he's asleep."

"Has he been drinking?" she demanded suddenly, and immediately she noticed that the room was full of the fumes of alcohol. "Has he been drinking — with you? And you let him?"

Mallette looked at her with those smiling eyes which seemed always to be saying of life, "Whatever you bring, I welcome it, what does it matter!" and answered, "I will go now; he will be himself in the morning!"



Claire, disdaining to notice him further, bent over Jamie and attempted to move him into a more comfortable position.

"Jamie!" she said gently, "Jamie!" and was beginning to untie his cravat when George's voice sounded in the room. He had opened the door just as Mallette had put out a hand for the knob. He was enveloped in a bathrobe of Turkish toweling and looked smaller than usual.

"What the devil — !" he began, looked suspiciously about him, and saw Jamie, whose condition instantly explained the situation to him.

"Oh, George!" cried Claire. "He's — he's drunk!"

"That's evident and his friend here brought him home. That's what you get for having anything to do with actors!"

"Hush, George, you'll wake Aunt Kate!"

"I might have left him in a gutter!" answered Mallette coolly. He seemed to be in less haste to go.

"It's a wonder you did n't."

Kate's door down the hall opened and her head done up in curl-papers appeared in it.

"Claire! Claire!" she called in a startled voice. "What's the matter?"

"What's the matter!" answered George, with no attempt to moderate his voice. "The matter is that our dear Jamie has been brought home dead drunk by his actor friend."

"You're making the most of a splendid chance to

give your brother away," remarked Mallette. "He'll have your entire family out of bed in a moment, Miss Nicholson."

Claire, still ignoring Mallette, exclaimed: "Please, George, do be quiet! Please go back to bed, Aunt Kate!"

George said to Mallette, "Will you please go?"

"Presently," Mallette answered. "I want to see if you intend to wake your uncle and your other aunt. Such a sporting thing to do!"


"Will you telephone for a policeman, Claire?" George for once seemed about to lose his temper.

And Claire said, "Please go, Mr. Mallette"; and while she said it, she hated him with her whole nature, for Jamie's condition, for being compelled to show herself half-dressed, for Kate's curl-papers, for George's Turkish toweling bathrobe, and for the whole outrageous and impossible situation.

"Please go, Mr. Mallette!" she repeated, and at that moment the voice of Edward rose from the floor below — not deep, but rather querulous and fretful. "What is the matter up there?"

Claire looked over the balusters to answer and saw him standing just inside his door. How frightfully old he looked, as he stood there in his suit of striped pajamas! She noticed his old neck, his abdomen, which seemed more enormous now than she could have thought possible for any abdomen to be, and his pudgy bare feet.

"It's all right, Uncle Edward. Jamie is n't feeling well. It's nothing."



"If you want to know the truth," George added, "he's so drunk his friend had to bring him home!"

"George!" exclaimed Claire under her breath; "how contemptible of you!"


A door closed vigorously below and as Claire looking down saw that her uncle had disappeared, his key turned sharply in the lock. The slight immediate complications he proposed to have nothing to do with evidently. His dignity would be better served by waiting and sitting in judgment in the morning.

Kate's door now reopened and she called out: "You had better tell Caroline. He may need a doctor!"

Caroline herself spoke now.

"Who needs a doctor — Jamie? What's the matter with him?" She, too, in a Turkish toweling bathrobe was halfway up the stairs, when, perceiving Mallette, she turned and quickly went down again, never stopping until just inside her door, when she repeated:

"What's the matter? Who needs a doctor?" And as her loud tones resounded on the stairs the Irish brogue of the awakened maids could be heard from above. Mallette advanced to the top of the stairs. Claire was sitting on the bed beside the insensible Jamie, George was standing near Mallette eyeing him threateningly, Kate could be seen peering through the crack of her door, Caroline was dimly discernible just inside hers, and the tousled heads of the three maids, almost invisible in the obscurity of the fourth floor, projected over the balusters.



"Miss Nicholson," said Mallette, with his clear enunciation, "your nephew, it is true, got drunk in my company. I tried to prevent it and stayed with him for fear some harm might come to him. I attempted to get him to his room without disturbing you, and would have succeeded had not his brother, who heard us, insisted on arousing your entire household. What his purpose was in doing so you may be able to judge better than I. I apologize for the part I have unwittingly played in this unpleasant incident and say good-night."

Mallette went downstairs and out of the front door without another word. Claire, in spite of the fact that she hated him because of Jamie's condition, thought that he had not come out of the affair so badly after all, and George looked for a moment rather foolish, but with his departure Caroline immediately ascended the stairs, sent Claire to her room, and with the assistance of Maggie proceeded to undress Jamie and get him into bed.



Claire lay and listened to them.

It was not necessary to be in Jamie's room to see Aunt Caroline; Claire knew her every motion too well, her brisk, unsympathetic, businesslike movements. George had stayed long enough to convince Caroline that a doctor was unnecessary and had retired. Soon Caroline and Maggie left the room and the house was still.

Claire got up once more and stood listening as she had done before. She stood until her body ached, listening for some possible sound which might indicate that

all was not well in Jamie's room, but gradually she became reassured, she heard him turn once or twice, once or twice a deep exhalation like a sigh almost of physical contentment became audible to her, and at last she got into bed.

Although she was very tired she did so reluctantly because she wished to go into Jamie's room and sit beside him, and she would have gone had she not begun to resent the brutal exposure of his condition to the family and to feel that she had taken part in it. Mallette had been right, and if George had betrayed him deliberately she would feel like never speaking to him again. One by one they had been summoned to inspect the spectacle of Jamie dead drunk, the whole household! His right of privacy, of reserve, torn away, and some one, who was not after all the real Jamie in the least, held up to infamy. No, that was not her Jamie; therefore she would not go in again. Jamie would not have had it so, and she would wait until he was himself once more. But still there was no evading the unescapable fact of his drunkenness. She had heard once or twice of young men getting drunk, but she did not live in circles where such things are taken as a matter of course, and the realization of what Jamie had done made her feel that a crisis had arisen in her life and his of fearful portent. Of portent for her as well as for him, because whatever happened she must stand by him. Somehow it had been a family habit to find fault with Jamie; it never seemed to matter whether there was anything really worth finding fault about nor



was the fault-finding of a particularly vicious nature; still it was always recurring, had become the usual thing, and now that there would be a real excuse for it she could well imagine the avidity with which it would be made use of.

All this does not mean that Claire was consciously condemning her immediate family. People often become so used to friction as to be unconscious of it, and while their custom of harrying Jamie hurt and annoyed her, it did not lessen feelings of regard which had become second nature. Now, however, it might take on a character which would call for an active defense on her part, and which would in consequence put a strain on old habits of obedience and respect. And she and Jamie would be alone together. Everybody would know about it immediately, and nowhere in the Nicholson family would Jamie be able to find refuge except with her.

Yes, they would be alone, and as she settled slowly into sleep she saw Mallette looking at her out of those strange, smiling eyes with their look of expectant and unquestioning welcome.

CHAPTER IV

CLAIRE had pictured to herself that night the ordeal of breakfast the next morning when she would be obliged to listen to a family castigation of the miserable Jamie, but she was spared this in part because both Edward and George had left the house by the time she reached the breakfast table. She had slept so late that Caroline had sent Annie to knock on her door, and only Aunt Kate was there, Caroline having finished. She noticed a breakfast tray standing on a small wall-table outside Jamie's door as she went down, indicating at least that Jamie was still in the land of the living and able to take nourishment.

Aunt Kate was always even less talkative in the morning than at other times. One of the crosses of her existence was that she had to get up for breakfast. During her whole life she had dreamed of taking it in bed, but such a custom would have been so at variance with every precept of the Nicholson family that she had never had the courage to suggest it.

She said "good-morning" to Claire now and went on reading the morning paper which was propped up against a silver jug used for hot water. Maggie brought in some porridge, and went out again. Claire helped herself to cream and sugar and said to Kate:

"How is he, Aunt Kate?"

"Who, Jamie?"

"Yes."

"He's all right, I think" — and then to Claire's intense surprise she added, "Such a fuss about nothing!"

"But Aunt Kate you did n't see him!" Kate's unexpected note of defense almost introduced one of censoriousness in her answer. Kate looked at her almost somberly. She was handsome, too, in her dark, heavy way, and, glancing through the library toward the parlor where Caroline and Annie could be seen, she answered:

"Anybody would think that no young man ever got drunk before!"

Maggie appeared again, this time with a pot of fresh coffee. Caroline came bustling in, saying "Phew! Phew! such a smell in the parlor! Can't find out where it comes from. Maggie, if you've finished waiting on Miss Claire, come and help Annie!" Caroline and Maggie joined Annie. There seemed to be a great moving of furniture and lifting of rugs going on in the parlor and library. Claire sniffed, but noticed nothing and went on with her breakfast.

"I can't smell anything," Kate called. "It's probably sewer gas!"

"I know what sewer gas smells like!" Caroline called back. "Phew! Phew!"

Claire finished her breakfast and going out into the hall saw a letter lying on the hat-rack. It was addressed to her, and she recognized the handwriting of her cousin, Helena Hampton. To Claire's surprise Helena asked her

to take lunch with her that day and to let her know by telephone. Claire telephoned, found that Helena was out, left word that she would be there at one, and went into the hall again. She did n't want to see Jamie until he was quite himself and Helena's invitation was as opportune as it was unexpected. She would go out at once and with the aid of it manage to be away most of the day.

As she passed the parlor door she saw Caroline and Maggie standing before Annie, who held some object gingerly between a pair of fire-tongs. Claire went in to look at it and immediately saw that it was the remains of the large cigar Jamie had lighted the evening before. This it was which Caroline had smelt. George, before going to bed, had disposed of what was left of his own cigar and Orville's and had aired the rooms, but he had forgotten that Jamie had thrown his into the fireplace where it had lain concealed behind the cast-iron firelogs until its stale odor had proclaimed the fact that something was poisoning the air and had aroused Caroline to begin a search for it. All three women were now regarding it hostilely, and Caroline, on seeing Claire, demanded, "Were they smoking in here last night?"

"I went up almost as soon as you did, Aunt Caroline!" Claire answered, and ran upstairs before Caroline could question her further. She put on her hat, and, waiting until she heard Caroline descend the basement stairs for her daily interview with the cook, quickly left the house, stopping to tell Maggie that she would not be home for luncheon.

Having the entire morning before her she began a slow progress uptown, stopping in various shops. By noon she had reached the park, and glad of a chance to sit down chose a bench near the Sherman statue.

If the exigencies of this story required her meeting Mallette at this point, it might be thought that the limit of probability was being stretched, but as such is not the case it must be accepted as fact when it is stated that she did, at this point, meet Mallette.


Mallette was passing without seeing her when, quite by the merest chance and much to Claire's annoyance, their eyes happened to meet. It was evident from Mallette's manner that his thoughts, far away, were brought sharply back to immediate speculation as to whether she intended to recognize him or not. Claire bowed instinctively, and he immediately stopped and came over to her.

"Miss Nicholson," he said at once, "I was just on my way home to write you a note. I would much rather tell you verbally what I have to say, so that I consider our meeting a fortunate one. May I sit down for a moment? It is about your brother."

Claire could not refuse.

"I have been thinking," he went on, sitting down on the bench, "about the incidents of last night. From your evident alarm at seeing your brother under the influence of drink, it seemed probable that it was the first time."

"Of course it was the first time!" answered Claire, almost sharply. "I'm sure it was the first time."



"I did not mean that it was the first time your brother had been under the influence of drink, but the first time you had seen him under it. Was it?"

"Yes," answered Claire.

"And have you never suspected that he is in the habit sometimes of drinking too much?"

Claire was about to return indignantly that it was unthinkable when she saw on Mallette's face a look of commiseration so sincere that a horrible fear clutched at her throat and prevented her from answering.

"Because," went on Mallette, softening his voice, as if by doing so he might lessen the shock of the announcement, "because it is true!"

Claire for a moment could n't speak — her Jamie!

"Do you mean that he does it often?"

"I'm sorry to say I'm afraid he does. I took it for granted that his people must know until last night. Something ought to be done for him, Miss Nicholson! He's such a dear chap!"

Not the most adroit calculation could have discovered a sentence more fitted to reëstablish Mallette in Claire's esteem than that last unpremeditated one. "A dear chap!" Yes, that was Jamie, so dear, so dear!

"I am sure he would stop for me, Mr. Mallette!"

"I am sure he might want to, but I am not sure that he would be able to."

Mallette's words opened a dark vista before her, and her eyes winced.

"Do you mean —?"

"That he has been going on for a good while. It does seem strange that none of your family had discovered it!"

"I don't think they were really interested enough in him, in what he was doing, to make finding out possible. *I* was the only one and I — well, I never dreamed —!"

"I know," said Mallette, "of course you did n't."

Claire turned her violet eyes on him full of entreaty.

"What must I do, Mr. Mallette?"

"Why don't you send him abroad? There's no real life for a man of his tastes here under ordinary circumstances, and then the war has upset so many."

"Away from home, Mr. Mallette!"

Mallette looked at her so curiously that Claire knew instantly that he was thinking that a surcease from home might be what Jamie most needed.

"I don't mean England; in some ways it's too much like New York; but the Continent, Paris preferably. The air is so different; there are serious workers there at what your brother loves. Here they play at work, and then — they don't get drunk there. He would n't either."

"Do you mean to study music?"

"Yes; he loves it so. He will never do anything here. There he would be thrown with people who have come from everywhere and who are in dead earnest."

"But the war ended all that."

"Not altogether. Life must go on you know, and it is what he needs."

"Yes, but to make my uncle and my aunt think so!"

"But as I understand it he is n't dependent on them. You may think that I have n't any right to say so, but I believe that he should go away!"

"That means that you think it's really serious!"

"Believe me, Miss Nicholson, it is!"

Claire sat without speaking for a moment, depressed and miserable. Mallette with his elbows on his knees, leaning forward and drawing lines in the gravel with his stick, was silent too until he made a movement which seemed to indicate that he was about to go — when Claire spoke quickly as if to detain him.

"Thank you, Mr. Mallette — and — I want to apologize for being rude to you last night. I blamed you for it then."

"I know! You see, I did n't realize when I first met your brother that I should become fond of him. After that I did my best to stop him." He got up and, looking at her with his smiling eyes, said, "Good-bye, Miss Nicholson!"

Claire got up too and put out her hand, saying warmly: "Good-bye. Thank you very, very much."

Each hesitated as if inclined to say something more, decided not to, and separated with a farewell murmur of departure. Claire walked out into Fifth Avenue and up to Sixty-Eighth Street to her aunt's house. Aunt Adelaide's brougham, with its two glossy bays, stood before the door. Horses were more *chic* for town use now than motors; therefore Aunt Adelaide had them,

although she was afraid of them and thought them much too slow. On ringing the bell the footman informed Claire that she was to go immediately to Miss Helena's sitting-room. She mounted the broad staircase noiselessly on the thick carpet and knocked at the door on the third floor. Helena's voice called, "Come in!" and Claire opened the door. Helena, with a liberal display of silk stocking which she immediately covered, was sitting by a window with a book in her hand. Although there was no reason why she should assume any special attitude for Claire's sake, Claire knew at once that her pose and the quick withdrawal of her legs under her skirt were both deliberately executed simply because posing was a habit. On seeing Claire, she got up and with her fixed and artificial smile advanced and kissed Claire's cheek, saying:

"How *sweet* of you to *come*! Mamma told me to say that she is *terribly* sorry, but that she is lunching out. We will stop and see her, going down, because she wants to say how do you do. How are Uncle Edward and Aunt Caroline and Aunt Kate, and George! She's *such* a dear!"


Claire could not tell which "she" Helena was referring to, so she asked, "And Aunt Adelaide?"

"Very well, only simply dreadfully tired! Shall we go down? I'm afraid there isn't *very* much for luncheon! How is Jamie? We never see him! Is he as crazy about music as ever?"

They descended to the second floor, where Helena,

after knocking, opened a door into a large room with three windows on Sixty-Eighth Street. A tall, emaciated woman, in a white shirt-waist and an unbecoming toque, was seated at a large mahogany desk writing letters with a worried expression. Aunt Adelaide was putting on a hat standing before a large mirror above the fireplace. She was plump, pretty, and youthful-looking. Helena said, "Here is Claire, mamma," and she turned quickly, thrust a final hatpin through her hair, and coming toward Claire kissed her cheek lightly, saying, "How do you do, my dear. How well you look! Miss Smith" — this was to the worried secretary — "you need n't mind the letter to Mrs. Gordon-Phelps. I had better attend to it myself. — What is it?" A maid had knocked at the door and now spoke in a low voice so that the others could not hear. "Why do you come to me? Go to the housekeeper," Aunt Adelaide cried sharply, and the maid went out again wearing a disagreeable expression. Miss Smith now said, "Will you look at these, Mrs. Hampton?" and Aunt Adelaide began looking hurriedly over a number of letters. Presently she exclaimed impatiently: "This is precisely what I told you not to say. You are sending all the regrets to the right people and the acceptances to the wrong ones. Really, Miss Smith — "

"But here is your list, the one marked 'accept' and the one 'decline,'" answered Miss Smith, so timidly that one could not help inferring that even if she were in the right she doubted whether she had the right to say so.



Aunt Adelaide looked at the list and saw that the muddle was hers. "Suppose I did! Have n't you been my secretary long enough to know what invitations I'm likely to accept and what I'm likely to decline? I'm afraid you'll have to write them all over again."

"Won't to-morrow do, Mrs. Hampton?" asked Miss Smith uneasily.

"I'm afraid, Miss Smith, that I shall be obliged to get some one else if you cannot find time to do my work. Why can't you do it now?"

"Because I have an appointment at Mrs. Slade's at two, Mrs. Hampton."

"What Mrs. Slade?" cried Aunt Adelaide sharply.

"Mrs. Arthur Slade."

"How long have you been going to Mrs. Slade's?" Aunt Adelaide's tone was no longer sharp, Mrs. Slade being a live social wire with an immense fortune.

"For a year, Mrs. Hampton, but always in the morning until lately."

Aunt Adelaide's face, on hearing that Miss Smith had been for a year in Mrs. Slade's employ, took on an expression of involuntary respect and she replied: "Very well, then; I have no objection to your doing them to-morrow. Au revoir, Claire; au revoir, Helena. You know I am lunching at the Bagnalls'." And she vanished into the gloom of the outer hall.


Claire and Helena went down another flight and seated themselves at a corner of the large, gloomy dining-room, which seemed to have been built only to

be used when artificially illuminated. Claire discovered almost at once that there was n't very much for luncheon, measured by the standards of a healthy young appetite. A silver dish was passed her containing a small quantity of creamed chicken, preceding a scanty salad made up of a variety of cold vegetables. There was so little that Claire was still ravenous when, on her plate being removed, another one took its place on which rested a saucer. The saucer was for the purpose of depositing in it the preserved peaches which were now passed, and after the peaches had disappeared the substitution of finger-bowls indicated that luncheon was at an end.

Helena, to compensate for its flagrant stinginess, exerted herself to be agreeable and ordering coffee, offered Claire a cigarette. Claire had eaten so little that she was obliged to refuse, not being much of a smoker. Helena led the way into a small sitting-room and, settling herself snugly far back on a cushioned sofa, said, as soon as coffee had been brought in, "Now for a cosy chat! What a *sweet* dress, Claire!"

"Do you like it?" said Claire. "I don't, very much. I was wondering only yesterday where you got *your* clothes. You have such pretty ones!"

"Oh, my dear, I'm simply heartbroken! I'm afraid I shall have to give my dressmaker up" — information about Helena's dressmaker was evidently not forthcoming. "But tell me about Jamie. What is he doing now? I saw you with him again yesterday at Carnegie,



talking with a man I know. I did n't know that *you* knew him!"

"I did n't until yesterday!" Claire, who had been wondering why Helena had asked her to luncheon, was wondering now if this might be the reason.

"But how did you meet him?"

"Jamie knew him!"

"Jamie!"

"Yes, Jamie knows him quite well. Mr. Mallette said he knew you."

"I adore Englishmen!" Helena cried. "They are so much more *chic* than our men. Of course, as for marrying them, that's another matter unless you can well afford it; they're all so poor. Did you like Mr. Mallette?"

Something impelled Claire to answer, "Yes, but George did n't!" — prepared to tell why. Helena said, "What do you mean?" and Claire answered:

"Jamie brought him home to dinner last night and George brought a Mr. Orville. Both George and Mr. Orville had met Mr. Mallette here, but both pretended that they had never seen him before. Jamie quarreled with George about it."

The effect of this statement on Helena was very marked. She sat perfectly still as if unable to move while an expression of deep confusion appeared on her face. Claire, who was accustomed to Helena's prepossessions, accepted this display without other comment than the thought, "Another of Helena's affairs," and began to tell in detail that part of the evening's

incidents, asking finally: "Who is Mr. Mallette, Helena? Is he really nice? I've never met an actor before and the family are awfully prejudiced against them."

Helena, who was herself once more, answered: "He's only just become one. He was in the army before that. He is a friend of Lord Hazelwood's. It's rather funny, is n't it, for George and Mr. Orville to look down on him! But the English are n't as popular with our men as they were."

"And who is Mr. Orville?"

"I believe nobody ever heard of him until lately. He comes from New Jersey somewhere. He was just a clerk in a broker's office in Wall Street, but now everybody wants to know him. They say he is one of the coming financial giants. I must say, he has given us some very good tips!"

"On what?" asked Claire.

"Stocks, of course!"

For some reason this caused Claire to say, "I think Mr. Mallette is something of a socialist!"

"He's quite different from any one I've known. Perhaps that accounts for it! I'm sure he's not that, though!"

"Do you know what socialists are, Helena?"

"Heavens, no; laborers, are n't they? What made you think Mr. Mallette is one?"

"Jamie said so."

"I don't believe it!" cried Helena. "Please don't let mother know; if she knew he was an actor, she would

be furious with Lord Hazelwood for bringing him here! And don't tell any one, Claire, he — Lord Hazelwood, I mean — has asked me to marry him. I have n't told mamma because I have n't decided, and I'm sure she would want me to. What do *you* think?"

"I don't know him," answered Claire.

"Oh, I wish you did! Then you could tell me what you think of him!"

Claire, who would have liked to meet an English lord, reflected that it would have been easy enough for Helena to arrange it if she had wanted to. Such, however, was plainly not her intention.

"Of course," Helena went on, "the trouble is that he has n't a penny. I suppose I shall have to tell mamma."

"But you have enough, have n't you?"

"For love in a cottage, perhaps — but I'm sure we'd both tire of that. One must have money or life is n't worth living, Claire."

"Do you think it makes much difference whether you live in a house like ours or one like yours?"

"Why, Claire, it makes *all* the difference! One must simply have everything one wants — much more than we have — if one is to be absolutely happy!" Helena, leaning back, smiled as if welcoming a vision of complete bliss, and Claire realized for the first time what she had always been partly aware of before, the physical appeal, invitation almost, which Helena seemed deliberately to radiate. In her short and scanty skirts, under which

her youthful body swelled buoyantly, her stockings of thin silk, her fragile, high-heeled, pointed slippers, her bodice cut to display her rounded neck, she seemed to say, "Behold! I am smooth and beautiful! Would you not like me? If you are rich enough, take me?"

"But, Helena, I don't agree with you at all; in fact it's so well known that money does n't make people happy that it's become a truism."

"Which everybody accepts and nobody believes," answered Helena.

"I'm sure many people believe it."

"Who? Just tell me! Every one we know who is n't rich is trying to be, not for money for its own sake, but for what it will bring them. Everybody may not want to buy the same things with it, but whatever they want they can't get it without money."

"You are talking of material things."

Helena fixed Claire with her pretty glance of wary worldliness and asked, "Everything is material, is n't it — what other things are there?" Claire would like to have answered, "Things of the spirit!" A sudden realization that she was not worthy to, prevented, but she said, "What of the war? What was it fought for if not to make a better world?"

"It's all very well to think about ideals," Helena answered, "but it does n't get you anywhere! The war was political and nothing else. Now that it's over, things will go on as they were. It's human nature. Why, everybody is trying harder than ever to make money,



and really it is the only thing that man exists for — it is life — there's no good saying it is n't, because it is. Look at Uncle Edward, and George, and Mr. Orville, and every single man who comes to this house. Do you suppose they bother about the war now it's over? They are all trying to get rich; most of them who come here *are* rich, mamma sees to that; and the richer they are the more the world gives them!"

"And you think that they are happy because they're just rich?"

"I think if they are not it's their own fault."

"Precisely!" exclaimed Claire; "it's their own fault and money has very little to do with it. I don't mean that it would be pleasant to be poor, but if what you believe is true, the richer you are the happier you must be, and that is n't and can't be true. Especially now when we are starting over again with an opportunity to make things better."


Helena smiled her artificial smile, which seemed to reveal the fact that the topic no longer interested her:

"It's very sweet of you to have such ideas, Claire!" And then, glancing at a little clock which stood on a writing-table close at hand, she jumped up — "Good gracious! Half-past three! I'm terribly sorry, but I've an engagement at four! You won't mind if I go and put on my hat — Perhaps we might — Which way are you going?"

"I shall probably go home straight down Fifth Avenue," Claire answered.

"And I am going uptown," said Helena; "well, good-bye! It's been sweet to see you!" She kissed Claire, enveloping her in a cloud of some delicate and unknown fragrance, adding casually, "If you should see Mr. Mallette, tell him that I am quite annoyed with him for not coming to see me!"


Claire found herself once more upon the only promenade New York can boast. At this point and for some distance south the park spread its verdure on one side. The street whirled with the machines of passing motors. A sight-seeing bus overtook her filled with wounded soldiers. She saw bandages, pallid and listless faces, crutches, and here and there an empty sleeve or trouser leg. A raucous voice issued from a megaphone, calling out: "Residence of Phineas Smalley, the chewing-gum millionaire! Magnificent mansion of C. Davison Pitt, the dry-goods king! Palace of Adolphus Seidenberg, the copper magnate! Mansion of Mrs. Jacobson, widow of the California multimillionaire brewer whose daughter recently married an Italian dook! Magnificent —!" The pallid and listless faces hardly turned, the raucous voice faded away into the distant turmoil of the street. An occasional note reached her, but it seemed to her — whimsically — as if she could almost hear — "Magnificent residence of Edward Nicholson, the millionaire button manufacturer! Palace of Dudley Orville, the Wall Street giant! Mansion of Mr. George Nicholson, the — the — " What *was* George? A financier, too, she sup-



posed, or intended to be. "To make the world safe for democracy!" That trumpet call! Did it mean nothing? It must be that out of those four bloody years something must come. She had wanted to say, "Things of the spirit," to Helena, but had been ashamed? Why? Because she knew that she was a stranger to them, and if she, why not others? Where must she and others search for them? Not in the Nicholson church could she find them, she knew that. And things of the mind! Things of the intellect and of the spirit! Where were they? What Helena said seemed after all to be true, that everybody wanted and cared only for material things. Everything else seemed unimportant, not worth bothering about, so long as you could be doing what everybody else did no matter how expensive it might be.

Claire, walking at a good pace through the mellow glow of the afternoon, had reached Forty-Sixth Street, when she saw a leg encased in a very thin silk stocking descending from a bus which had stopped a little ahead of her. Claire recognized it at once. It was one of Helena's. The other followed it immediately and Helena crossed the Avenue. Remembering that Helena had said that her appointment was uptown and that Forty-Sixth Street was distinctly the other way, Claire could not forbear waiting on the corner. Helena hurried down Forty-Sixth Street and vanished through the doorway of the Ritz.

Claire smiled again, this time half from exasperation. What earthly difference could it have made if Helena




had told her that she had an engagement at the Ritz and they had come down together? Any one would think that Helena was afraid that Claire would not only display undue curiosity about it, but even force her way into the Ritz to find out who it was with. That kind of secretiveness was really exasperating; George had it, too. She wondered if it was a Nicholson trait.

Claire, a little tired and out of sorts after her long day away from home, and the rather sordid cogitations set in motion by her conversation with Helena, was annoyed by this trivial incident and involuntarily looked about for relief. She found it in the proud façade of a picture dealer whose spacious doorway invited her entrance to an exhibition, which a poster announced was being held free of charge within.

Claire went in, crossed a wide and lofty hall and entered a gallery where a score of people, moving and speaking as cautiously as if they were in dangerous proximity to some ill-tempered deity, were looking at another score of paintings which hung, with dignified spaces between, on the wide walls of the gallery, and ignoring the politely welcoming glances of two elegant young salesmen, who plainly intimated that they would be delighted to do the honors for so handsome a girl, she sank into the yielding embraces of a deep sofa upholstered with an expensive covering of cut velvet.

She surrendered herself at first to the agreeable sensations produced by the soft cushions on which she sat, the beautiful room, and the sudden quiet after the



roar of the Avenue, but presently she began to interest herself directly in her immediate surroundings. The pictures emerged first through the veil of her idle pre-occupations and demanded her attention. They were simple, vigorous, bold, and poetical, and painted with a palette and a technique of, to Claire, a fascinating strangeness. They were of the sea and shore. An old foreign town and the sea. Mountains and the sea. A forest through which one saw the sea. A terrace and the sea. The foliage was semi-tropical. Clearly they had been painted in some land she did not know — Spain or the south of France. Claire got up, made the tour of the room, and returned to her seat. The picture which faced her showed the dark aisles of a forest out of which one's eye swept, far into the distance, a blue sea brilliant with sunshine, and as she looked Claire's spirit with a sweet sense of exultation began to rise, to soar aloft. What was this strange sweet feeling her soul responded to so readily when brought close to beauty? Plainly something to be treasured, something one must not lose. Did other people have it? Jamie had. But commonplace people like the people in this room: did their souls take wing as hers did? Claire began watching them, trying without much success to find out, when she noticed for the first time a little man standing near her. He had a broad forehead with pale, sparse hair, light, gentle blue eyes, a small chin, and a mouth of melancholy and whimsical helplessness. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and seemed to be conscious of cer-

tain naïve efforts he had evidently been making to smarten himself up. A very large stiff collar with a badly tied tie. A pair of new trousers, rather large, too, at the ends of which appeared brown boots which he seemed to have forgotten to polish. As he stood near her one of the elegant young men approached and, addressing him as Mr. Humphries, asked him some question. Mr. Humphries replied to it and the young man went away. Claire thought that she remembered the name, and, looking at the small catalogue she held, verified her suspicions. The little man, Mr. Humphries, was also the painter of the pictures on exhibition.

She began to watch him. He would stand about rather wretchedly for a time, as if wishing himself almost anywhere else, and then presently would begin to look at one of his pictures, when he would change, soften, become rapt, almost exultant as Claire herself had been, until, remembering that he was in an inimical place, he would start slightly and begin furtively to search the faces of the visitors. He would search questioningly, anxiously, presently to turn away with an expression of whimsical depression, and go back to renewed absorption of one of his canvases. "How he loves them!" thought Claire; "and how he watches, trying to find, as I tried to find, some one who is really touched by them! But that is expecting too much, perhaps; they do not wear their hearts on their sleeve any more than I, poor little man!"

Claire got up to go and glanced at him once more.



But was he poor? He was standing before the painting which had faced Claire, looking through the dark forest aisles out to sea with a look of bland pleasure and of reminiscent love. "He is painting his picture over again," said Claire to herself. "*He* does not care for material things." And yet in him, too, she was aware of an element of egoistic preoccupation. Ah, money! Perhaps, as Mallette had said, all the old prepossessions must be cast aside and the solutions of the future be found only in efforts wholly altruistic.

"A very remarkable exhibition!"

One of the elegant young men stood smiling deferentially before her.


"Very," Claire assented. "Have any of them been sold?"

"Not yet," answered the young man, "but we are almost sure to sell some of them. They are to be here all next week. Mr. Phineas Smalley, the chew — ahem! manufacturer — perhaps you know his new palace on the Avenue — who is collecting modern American pictures, has made an offer for one of them. Are you especially interested in American paintings?"

"Yes, in all paintings," answered Claire with a smile, and, eluding the young salesman's effort to open a conversation, she found herself once more on the Avenue. She turned south intending to go directly home, but almost at once she realized that she was very hungry. Helena's meager luncheon must be supplemented, or she could not possibly wait for dinner, and as she was

passing Sherry's she turned down toward its entrance. Mounting the steps she was about to enter, when, glancing in, it seemed to her as if since the day before nothing had changed. The same fashionably dressed women and the same young and old men seemed to be waiting about in the same attitudes, and a sudden distaste which it might have been difficult for her to analyze caused her to turn toward the Avenue once more and seek a small tea-room she remembered having seen in one of the side streets lower down. She sat here for half an hour and then continued her journey. Dusk had come when she reached home. As she let herself into the house the sound of the piano met her. Some one was playing softly in the parlor, and looking in she saw Jamie. By that intuitive knowledge one has about a dwelling-place long lived in under unchanging conditions, Claire knew that no one — with the exception of the maids — was at home. Jamie had come down secure in his loneliness and had not heard her come in. In the dusk of the room, illuminated by the fading light which came from the tall windows, he looked, she thought, pale and rather ill, but his face wore the same look of rapt absorption she had seen on the little painter's earlier in the afternoon, an expression of pensive and simple joy.

He was playing something, trying certain bars over and over, and Claire was sure that it was a composition of his own. How sweet it was, how searching! Dear, dear Jamie, and she went into the room, almost for-



getting the distressing circumstances of the night before, but Jamie recalled them to her, for, as if confused and startled by her sudden entrance, he stopped and rose, looking at her with an expression of ashamed appeal which touched Claire inexpressibly, and going up to him she put her arms around him and, without speaking, pressed him to her. She felt Jamie's arms enfold her, too, and in the dusk they stood there long, in silence, strained in an ineffable embrace.

CHAPTER V

THE front door opened and closed again, a hat was hung on the hat-rack, and they heard some one going upstairs. From the sound of the hat, it was plain that either Edward or George had entered, and each knew, intuitively, or by some slight sign, the character of the step on the hall floor, the nature of the slight creak emitted by the stairway, that of these two it must be Edward.


A door closed immediately overhead confirming their deductions.

"Come, darling" — Claire spoke almost in a whisper — "we must go up; it is almost dinner-time."

Jamie, she could tell, was hesitating, and presently he said, whispering too in the darkness which now filled the room:

"I — I say, Claire. I don't want to have dinner here. Can't we go out somewhere — to the Brevoort?"

Claire perceived in a flash that this suggestion was a good one. It would be much better for Jamie to rejoin the family current the next morning at breakfast than that night. In that way, appearing at an informal and rather desultory meal, with Edward and George in a hurry to get away, the regular routine could be resumed more gradually. Then, too, if she left word that she and Jamie were dining out together, it would serve as a



hint that she had taken Jamie under her protection, and that in dealing with him they must consider her.

"Of course we can! I'll tell Maggie!" And she started toward the dining-room just as Maggie, with the punctuality of an automaton, appeared with her brass instrument for the purpose of lighting up the parlor.

"Mr. Jamie and I are dining out, Maggie."

"Yes, Miss Claire."

They went into the hall, and as Jamie took his hat from the rack both saw that one side of it was dented in and covered with dust. Jamie, with a movement half furtive, half apologetic, straightened and brushed it hastily, and they went out, but this slight incident had changed Claire's mood. She had thought to walk hand in hand with him in the darkening street until they reached Fifth Avenue, but the sight of his soiled and dented hat, silent testimony of his degradation — temporary at least — had depressed her horribly and brought back suddenly Mallette's fears for his future unless something were done. They walked side by side in silence until Jamie said:

"Mallette may be there. He almost always dines there. He lives in the Square, you know."

"But, Jamie, why does n't he do something better than being an actor? Not that being an actor is n't all right, but I don't suppose he is prominent or I should have heard of him."

"He is n't. He's a good light actor. But he's got to live. Thousands and thousands are being thrown

into civil life now the war is over. We'll go to see him sometime."

"But what is he, Jamie? I mean what was he before the war?"

"I don't know much about him."

Jamie went on rather desperately after a moment:

"But what I like about Mallette is that if he had n't a cent to his name or a shirt to his back, he'd be just the same; it would n't change his spirit. I mean that somebody's got to see to it that *something* has got to come of all those four years of suffering which are just over. Do you suppose that people like our family and like that rotten Orville care a damn about it?"

"Oh, Jamie," breathed Claire in remonstrance, "you must n't!"

"Well, I'm sick of it, Claire, and if they're going to jump on me, as I know they will, I'll tell them what I think. I behave badly at times, I'll admit, but there are reasons, and I'm going to tell them that they have n't any more conception of what the war was really like than they have of what is going on in Mars. That if they had, they'd kick over their household gods and try to change things. Ten million lives were lost. Do you think it has made the slightest impression on them? Made them feel that with such things possible something is wrong which ought to be set right?"

"I know it, Jamie; but nobody could be kinder than Aunt Caroline."

"I know; but I want them to understand that there

are people in the world who can't be happy living as they do. I want them to understand there are such things as ideals, and I want them to have a few themselves. I don't care anything about their being kind!"

"But must n't idealists be kind?"

"Certainly *not*! That's the trouble with them. They're usually so damned kind that nobody has any opinion of them. That's what I like about Mallette. He's an idealist if you like, but he is n't kind! And, besides, I don't call Aunt Caroline and the rest of them kind. They're all right if you're like them, but if they don't understand you, you're simply beyond the pale!"

Jamie paused, and glancing quickly at Claire resumed in a different tone: "And, Claire, don't — don't think I'm trying to excuse myself for anything I've done — because I'm not!"

"I know. But try not to do it again, Jamie. It hurt me so!"

"Yes, Claire!" he answered simply; and they were back again in their old relationship, that of simply loving one another.

"And, Jamie, I'm going to see if I can't get Uncle Edward to let you go abroad. You really ought to go."

"If he only would," replied Jamie. "Is n't it silly, Claire? Here I am wasting my time at the office where I'm no earthly use, when I might be developing what talent I *have* got to some good purpose. I try to work, but it plays the devil with me, I hate it so; and sometimes I feel that I must do something devilish or simply

explode. If I were to explain that to them, do you think they would understand me in the least, or try to? No; they would think either that I was n't telling the truth or that I could be like them, if it was n't that I was incorrigible and would n't try. That's what you'll find yourself up against when you tackle Uncle Edward."

"I know it, Jamie, but I'm going to do my best."

"I know you will, but that's what you'll be up against! Prejudice — blind prejudice! You and I, and the new generations or forces coming up in the world, try to do things and prejudice is always trying to block us and them. It makes your blood boil to think of it."

They found an empty table in the lower floor by a window which gave them, by looking out slantingly, a view of a corner of the Arch and behind it the leafage of Washington Square. The pavement from this basement room ran past them almost level with their eyes, and under the trees there was a continuous scurry of taxicabs and buses, and through the open windows a faint mild breath of spring came occasionally and touched their faces.

"Do you mind if I see whether Mallette is here?"

"Not at all," answered Claire; "ask him to dine with us if you want to."

Jamie returned presently to say that he had not found Mallette, but had left word for him to join them in case he did come in, and before their dinner arrived he was seen approaching.

When they had ordered dinner, Claire and Jamie had



avoided any question of beverage, but Mallette immediately ordered a Scotch and soda, saying to Jamie, "You won't have any, I suppose!" with an unstudied frankness which surprised Claire not a little. But this transparent frankness, which displayed itself as one of Mallette's unmistakable traits, seemed to place them at their ease, seemed to proclaim that if there was anything necessary to be said about Jamie's behavior he would have said it at once, and as he did not they might both, Jamie and Claire, forget their doubts and apprehensions for the moment with a clear conscience and enjoy the hour as they might. It seemed to Claire as if things, temporarily at least, had been taken out of her hands; that she had been bidden not to worry, and her spirits rose. Jamie, too, began to revive perceptibly and his whimsical expression began to show itself once more.

Presently Claire gave Mallette Helena's message. Mallette acknowledged the invitation politely and made no further comment, but Jamie indulged in one of his grimaces and supplemented it by saying, "Why on earth should Helena want to see *you*?"

"Why, Jamie!" Claire exclaimed.

"Mallette does n't mind," answered Jamie reassuringly. "We're very frank with each other — Mallette and I — and he knows the queerest people!"

"And don't you?" challenged Mallette.

"I mean so diverse — Helena at one end, and street-cleaners and people like that at the other!"

"That was at first," explained Mallette somewhat enigmatically.

"At first?" asked Claire.

"I mean when I first came here. I was so keen to find out what America was like, I made friends with everybody."

"I expect you found it like any other place," Jamie observed.

"Very like," answered Mallette.

"Did you expect to find it different?" asked Claire.

"I did, rather. In one way it is different. You're kinder here than people are in old countries. But that is not a virtue."

"We were talking about kindness — Jamie and I — just a little while ago. Jamie does n't believe in it either."

"I believe in it, but people should be just first — kind afterwards."

"Oh, no, no!" Claire answered. "I would never agree with you there. What a place the world would be if justice ruled instead of kindness!"

"And what a place it is, with neither ruling!"

"Are you forever finding fault with it?"

"Not for myself," he answered; "hardly anybody gets more out of it than I do; but when I look at it as I would like to be able to look at everything if I chose, from a point of view absolutely impersonal and detached. Have you ever tried to do that?"

"But why should I?" asked Claire, looking at him

out of her fresh young eyes so challengingly that he smiled, answering: "Why should you, indeed!"

"Not that I would not like to know and understand many things I don't know now," Claire resumed; "but sometimes I feel afraid that a good many of them might make me unhappy!"

"But the time is coming when people will no longer avoid things which might make them unhappy. In each generation more and more men and women are being born into the world supplied with a sense which our forefathers lacked, a sense which makes injustice intolerable to them; and when there are enough of them, things will change, and the curse of the world will disappear."

"What curse?" asked Claire.

"Exploitation! Did n't you know?" Mallette replied almost solemnly.

Claire blushed but she answered bravely:

"No, I did not. What *is* exploitation?"

"The economic and political enslavement of the great mass of humanity."

"Slaves!" cried Claire; "how can they be slaves?"

"Has not this war shown us the political slavery of man? As to his economic slavery, do you know how poor people live?"

"Some of them live in tenement houses just behind our house."

"Watch them sometimes and see if you think they live as they do from choice or from necessity?"

"If they do not like living as they do, can't they change?"

"Can they? Ask them."

"But surely men who are born poor, but who have ability, make places for themselves in the world?"

"And the others?"


"They are incompetent, I suppose, or lazy."

"And can we let it go at that? I'm afraid not. How many of the rich are incompetent and lazy, too? Do they suffer for it, as the poor suffer? No, there is not only a sense of social responsibility, but an impatience, a rebellion against old conditions growing up in the world which we can't escape, and if our present social machinery will not remedy things for us, we must disregard it altogether or scrap it completely."

As Mallette spoke, Claire saw that his eyes still smiled, but that a blaze pierced through the smile.

"Something may happen, something vast and unsettling has happened, which I believe will bring these changes quickly — but quickly or slowly, they will come."

As Mallette was speaking, Claire's eyes had rested on a small jar which, standing on that end of the table which touched the wall, held a bouquet. The jar, wide-mouthed, simple in outline, and finished with a rough soft glaze of warm and yet pale gray, seemed familiar to her, and looking at it more intently she saw that a series of letters widely spaced encircled it marked in the glaze near its lower edge. Taking the vase in her hand



to examine them more closely, and beginning with the letter "M" which a larger space preceding it seemed to indicate as the initial letter, she spelled out, turning the vase slowly, "M-a-l-l-e-t-t-e."

"Why, how funny!" Claire exclaimed, looking up at him. "Here is your name written in the glaze of this jar!"

Mallette smiled.

"Have you never seen that jar before?"

"Let me see; yes, it's — it's —"

"A jam pot!"

"Of course! I've seen them ever since I was a child, but without its label I did n't recognize it at first. And that's where I've seen your name. I thought I had heard it before."

"Yes, 'Mallette's Jams' and 'Mallette's Marmalades' are household phrases. We have been making them for three generations now."

"Are you related —?" began Claire.

"The present Mallette is my father."

"But, jam, Mallette! It's worse even than buttons!" Jamie exclaimed.

"The making of jam is an honorable occupation," answered Mallette; "just as the making of buttons is an honorable occupation if it is conducted honorably."

The table had been cleared, and the waiter, putting down the coffee, disappeared. Mallette and Jamie lighted cigarettes.

"There are two great jam concerns in England,"

Mallette began — “Mallette’s and Small’s; and for three generations the Mallettes, as I have said, and the Smalls, too, have been drawing riches from their factories. The fact that the making of jam is an honorable occupation is attested in the case of the Mallettes and the Smalls by the general esteem in which they are held, although this may be accounted for rather by the amount of money they have made out of their business than by the nature of the business itself. In our family life one would hardly know that we manufactured jam at all. Mallette’s jam is not even served at our table — it was always Small’s; and it is said that at the Smalls’ table it was always Mallette’s, a custom which has become traditional: each house in this way shirking a disagreeable actuality and at the same time paying a graceful compliment to the other. As I grew up and began to read, I saw, of course, the lavish advertisements of Mallette’s jams; but I never connected them with my family until I was ten, when I was enlightened by a schoolmate who taunted me with the fact; but his statement had no disagreeable consequences as far as I was concerned, because my wealth made me so much of a personage with the masters that the offending boy was reprimanded severely!”

Mallette paused.

“Would you like to hear a little more about myself, or does it bore you?” he asked.

“Oh, yes, please!” both Claire and Jamie answered, and he went on.


“We had a house in London, another in Kent, another in Scotland, and were forever going about from one to another as rich people do. We really had more money than we knew what to do with, and had always had, and as I was an only son — I have a sister older than I — it was not stinted on my education. During my last summer holiday at Oxford I went into the East End of London to stop with a college friend who was spending his vacation there as a settlement worker. A clergyman, a relative of his, had founded the place and my friend had a room there which I shared. The experience was depressing at first, but intensely interesting; it was a change, being lost among these strange swarms — more complete than any I had ever known, and the self-sacrifice of the people living in that little house was really too fine for any words to express. After I had been there a fortnight he took me to a dance-hall conducted by the settlement for the purpose of keeping the young of both sexes off the streets. I can’t tell you how it interested and yet repelled me. It interested me because their enjoyment of the place was so keen, so avid, as if they were drinking in something they were starving for, that it roused an intense feeling of compassion, and they repelled me because of their bodies, so pale; their thick hands, their bad teeth, their cheap clothing, and because of a feeling that they could not be clean, and that they lived under conditions which would be for me simply intolerable.

“On our way home that night I asked my friend

about them, how they lived and where they were employed, if employed at all.

“‘Rather!’ he answered; ‘they all work, most of them in the jam factories — Mallette’s — or Small’s.’

“It may seem incredible, but at that time I did not even know that our factories were in the East End of London. Whether my friend mentioned the name Mallette inadvertently, or did not know my connection with it, does n’t matter. I went out the next morning to look for our factories. They were not hard to find, and presently I saw them, a huge pile of buildings, irregular in shape, as if they had grown by degrees, so that you had to walk down more than one street before you could really comprehend their extent. At one place a gateway, which was the main entrance, opened into a large, irregular courtyard, and at one side of the courtyard stood a small building with a sign on one side which indicated it as the general office of the works. Down each street along the top story of each building the word ‘Mallette’ was printed in really gigantic letters. I kept out of any line of vision afforded by the position of the office and wandered about, looking at the buildings from every point of view, listening to the sounds of machinery, until all at once a whistle sounded and the workers began to appear, first by ones and twos, then in large groups, then in a steady stream which poured out of the gateway in a torrent, and as I stood looking at them a feeling of fright, of real terror, took hold of me. All this was mine — my father had often said so — the buildings, the



trucks, the machinery, the clerks, the bookkeepers, the foreign branches, the whole great business, and — as it suddenly struck me — the workers. They were mine, too — anæmic, ill-nourished, prematurely old, broken down before their time, ignorant, and without hope of any change! They were my slaves, working for me, a man that they had never seen, for wages which made of life a disgraceful thing, so that I might live in luxury; and a cold sweat broke out on me, and I remember gripping my hands together and saying to myself through my clenched teeth, ‘I will not have them! I will not! I will not!’”

Mallette stopped and said: “My feelings were exactly as I describe them. I am not exaggerating in the least, and you must remember that my fortnight in the slums had taught me things which enabled me to grasp the situation at once completely and vividly in a way I could not otherwise have done.

“Yes, that fortnight had made a tremendous impression on me. It seems a strange thing, but many men go through life from childhood to old age without ever coming in contact with or really understanding that there exists, and that a few people are trying to deal with, the problem of poverty, but I had been partly awakened to it at Oxford by my friend and by a few other men there who were mildly interested in socialism, and I occasionally saw some of the labor periodicals, but what poverty was actually like, I had not the faintest conception until I made my visit to the East End.

“Well, I had it out with my father, and found it was impossible for us to understand each other. There was n’t any slavery about it as far as he was concerned. The works paid certain weekly sums, a pound, thirty shillings, two pounds, whatever the sum might be, for certain kinds of work. If you could do that kind of work acceptably, the job was yours; if you did n’t want it, that was your affair. Take it or leave it. It was simple enough, and his attitude toward his hands would have been as impersonal as it was toward his machinery, or the shiploads of oranges he got every year from Spain, if it had n’t been tinged with hostility. A hostility which was mutual and had always existed, because from time to time, in the hope of bettering their condition, the workers would strike, arousing irritation and anger and a loss of money on both sides.

“My father took the trouble to explain to me — and as I look back I am surprised, because his is not a conciliatory nature — the absurdity of my ideas and the impossibility of changing present conditions even if we wanted to, the whole interlocked complicated machinery of capital and labor, the balance of supply and demand, and the disorganization arbitrary fixing of wages would work in the market of labor at large; but when I suggested profit-sharing, he lost his temper and called me a fool for thinking for a moment that he would divide the earnings of Mallette capital and Mallette ability with the ungrateful riff-raff of the streets.

“But on my part I could n’t evade the fact that it was

by the labor of all those wretches that we were living as we were, and that while, generation after generation, we were accumulating money, generation by generation our workers were disappearing into the grave without having known during their whole lives what comfort meant, bodily ease, real happiness, physical or mental well-being. For I had been to their houses. Between the first day when I had seen our works, and the end of my visit at the Settlement, I had visited exclusively the places where they lived.

“It was, I must say, a tremendous disappointment for my father,” Mallette went on, “because he took such pride in Mallette’s. Men take pride in such strange, childish things — one that his watch keeps perfect time, another in the fact that he has been operated on for appendicitis, another, that he can run faster than almost any one else, another that he goes without an overcoat even in the coldest weather; and my father, that we had, by selling at a large profit, great quantities of jam which a lot of poverty-stricken creatures made for us, succeeded in amassing a huge fortune. Each one of these prides seems to me as futile as the other. As the business had been handed down to him so he hoped to hand it down to me; it was a dream of his that Mallette’s should be administered even into the distant future by an unbroken line of male Mallettes.

“‘One day,’ he said to me, ‘Felix, if you were to inherit Mallette’s, what would you do with it — close it down?’

“‘Oh, no,’ I answered; ‘that would be shirking the matter.’

“‘What, then, would you do?’

“‘Change it into some kind of a coöperative concern.’

“‘Suppose you found it did not pay; that under your plan you were running it at a loss?’

“‘I should make up the deficit.’

“‘Even if you had to do so out of your private fortune?’

“‘Yes; and I may say now that I would see to it that that fortune was employed for the benefit of those who made it!’”

Mallette stopped and sighed.

“It was so difficult — the situation. For centuries the whole world had looked at such matters as my father looked at them. To him it was right and reasonable, while to me it was all so wrong that I must combat it if I wanted to keep my self-respect. At last he came to me with an ultimatum. If I did not agree to promise not to interfere in the administration of the Mallette works and the conservation of the Mallette fortune, I was to be given a pension, a generous one, and my father was to execute a will whereby the Mallette works and the Mallette fortune would revert to my sister’s child, a little boy. This arrangement he said was to remain in force only until such time as I should have definitely changed my views. In other words, if I wanted at any time to go back on his terms I was free to do so.

Mallette paused again. "Well, that was the end! We had it out together! It was very painful! To my father I am not only an erratic fool, but an ungrateful one, too. I have n't seen him since nor have I had a penny of him — I refused the pension — although you may imagine that to make one's living at first, with the kind of training I had had, was not an easy task. After a year the war came and I went in at once. I hear sometimes from my sister — I have no mother — and my father is still engaged in selling jam in still greater quantities and in increasing still more the fortune which one day will go to my nephew!"

Mallette stopped, smiled, and said, "That is my history!"

"And did n't you go back to the East End?" asked Claire.

"That might seem the logical outcome of my conduct," answered Mallette, "but for that kind of work I decided that one must have gifts which I lacked; the injustice of it made me too angry and impatient of the insensibility which makes it possible. I tried it for a while, and then I got out —"


They got up, and going out into the Avenue walked slowly toward the Square.

"That was a fine thing — acting as you did, Mr. Mallette," Claire said.

"No, what I did was n't fine," Mallette answered, "but it was a fine thing that my eyes were opened in

time, and what I did may help. All these poor devils are working at starvation wages, as they have always done, but perhaps the ethical force of my act may help to bring their emancipation a little nearer."

Mallette walked through Ninth Street with Claire and Jamie and parted from them before the high steps of their house. They let themselves in noiselessly and climbed the stairs together. Outside her door, Claire bade Jamie good-night, and going into her room stood by the window looking across at the tenements. It was still early. In one room an old, old man was breaking a box into kindlings with a hatchet. In another, where a woman cooked, there was a bed; some one lay in it. She could see a dark, emaciated face and the outlines of a body lying motionless. In a lower room a workman was washing his feet in a basin, feet like clods, dirty and thick; and in another, where a man sat with his hat on, smoking his pipe, in his shirtsleeves, while the room seemed full of children, a pale woman lay in bed suckling a baby.



CHAPTER VI

CLAIRE, when estimating the advantage to Jamie of joining the family at breakfast the next morning, had forgotten it would be Sunday breakfast, about the very worst meal which could have been chosen. Edward and George, deprived of the solace of business, were distrait and preoccupied; Caroline was rather irritable at the prospect of having them on her hands for most of the day, and Kate usually came down with a slight Sunday morning headache. Every Saturday she purchased a pound box of chocolates at Maillard's. Before retiring, which was always early on that night, she would produce the box and pass it. Half a dozen pieces would, perhaps, be taken. She would then go upstairs without passing it again, and in the morning Annie, the chamber maid, would invariably find the box empty. Before going to bed she had eaten the entire pound. Consequently the headache.

The fact that the coming day was Sunday, however, had one advantage. Claire would have an opportunity to talk with Uncle Edward about Jamie.

Edward and Caroline invariably arrived at the breakfast table at eight o'clock impelled by their sense of punctuality. Claire and George usually came next, not from a sense of the inviolability of the breakfast hour, but because they were normal, healthy young

animals who had had their sleep out and had got up directly it was finished. This was in case George had not been out the night before and disordered his digestion by a late supper, a thing he was likely to avoid. Jamie, luxurious and slightly neurotic, would come next, and Aunt Kate, an incorrigible sluggard, last of all. But on this occasion Claire had waited for Jamie, who was longer than usual, and when they finally reached the dining-room even Kate was there drinking a cup of very strong coffee.

A general good-morning was said, somewhat vague where Jamie was concerned, and a rather forbidding silence followed, to be broken presently by Caroline, who asked, addressing Edward:

“Was anything ever done about Mr. Weston?”

Opposite the Nicholsons' house on Ninth Street a row of small houses faced them. They were of red brick with high steps of brown stone. The high steps of these houses, the iron railings, the front doors, the areas, the windows, and the houses themselves were all exactly alike. They belonged to Caroline, and Mr. Weston, a tenant of one of them, had always shown himself strangely reluctant to pay his rent.

“He broke his promise again this week,” Edward replied. “I expect we'll have to serve a dispossession notice on him.”

“Why not sue him?” Caroline demanded. “I say sue him and have it over with!”

“He's a musician or something like that,” answered

Edward, almost angrily; "they never have any money. I'm surprised that Mrs. Praed should have recommended him so well."

"Such a handsome fellow, too," Kate remarked.

"Maggie," Caroline commanded, "bring me that small package. The one on the mantelpiece."

Maggie gave it to her, and unfolding the paper so that it still protected her fingers from the object it contained, Caroline exposed Jamie's cigar.

"Is that yours?" she demanded of George.

George, replying easily that it was not, she turned to Jamie.

"Yes, it's mine," Jamie answered, casting Claire a glance which seemed to say, "Well, here goes!"

"Phew! Take it away, Maggie! Well, it lay there all night before last smelling up the whole place. It's a pity you can't take the trouble to do what the family wants you to once in a while. I don't know whether I'll ever be able to get that smell out of the curtains!"

Edward supplemented this by saying:

"You know your aunt does n't like smoking in the parlor; what do you do it for?"

"Oh, Uncle Edward!" Claire interposed. "Other men do it. George and Mr. Orville were smoking night before last just as well as Jamie."

"If George smokes in the parlor, he puts the cigar in the ash-can afterwards and takes the trouble to air the room." This from Aunt Caroline.

"I've done that, too," answered Jamie. "I always

do it, only night before last I forgot. I've known George to forget it too!"

"It was very funny that you should forget! What were you doing to make you forget?" Caroline seemed to be insinuating that Jamie even then was somewhat fuddled.

"He forgot because he was angry with George for being rude to Mr. Mallette. George had met him at Helena's and pretended he had never seen him before," Claire explained.

"At Helena's!" answered Caroline with the expression a boxer might wear on receiving an unexpected back-hander.

"That does n't mean anything," George interposed. "A friend of his happened to take him there. There's not much danger of his going again. You know Aunt Adelaide does n't cotton to people like that!"

"I should say not!" answered Caroline.

"Do you know who Mr. Mallette is?" asked Claire challengingly of George and the table at large. "He's the only son of Mallette, the great English jam manufacturer!"

This statement was followed by a dazed silence in which expressions of doubt, regret at the possibility of their having said something which Mallette might treasure against them, and an evidently changed point of view toward him were mingled.

But George, recovering himself, retorted:

"That's a likely story!"

"If you doubt it, it's easy enough to find out whether it's so or not!" answered Claire, "Mallette has an agent here; they could probably tell you."

"What's he doing on the stage?"

"That's his affair, I suppose."

In spite of George's sincere or assumed incredulity, Claire's statement seemed heavy with the convincing weight of truth.

"I must say," Caroline observed, "it was kind of him to — " She had started to say that it was kind of Mallette to fetch Jamie home, but, remembering in time that Jamie was present, she checked herself. "By the way, Edward, our dividends were a week late this quarter. What's the matter?"

Edward, who was eating bacon and eggs, stopped. His head was bent and he did not raise it, and for a moment his hands, one holding a knife, the other a fork, rested inertly beside his plate.

"What — what was that? Oh, yes — The clerk who gets out the checks was sick in bed. I did n't hear you at first!" It seemed to be an effort for him to answer.

Caroline looked at him. His skin, always pale under his white mustaches, looked, she thought, whiter than usual, but as he went on at once with his breakfast she thought no more about it.

Claire's revelation of Mallette's identity proved to be a happy incident, for as getting drunk in the company of Mallette's only son was obviously quite different

from getting drunk with a common actor, Jamie's offense was somewhat mitigated; but only for the present, as Claire well knew; therefore, immediately after breakfast she started to follow Edward to his basement room, but George was already slipping down before her.

She waited ten minutes, and then, following, knocked on the sanctum door, opening it in response to her uncle's invitation to come in. George was seated, and as he showed no intention of leaving, in spite of her "May I speak to you, Uncle Edward?" she added, after a moment — "about Jamie?"

During the five years that Claire, George, and Jamie had lived at Ninth Street, where they had gone after the death of their father, their mother having died two years earlier, her knowledge of her uncle had not increased nor had their relationship grown a degree closer. He had always been to her an insoluble enigma. He came and went with the regularity of clockwork. During these five years his voice and manner never varied. Always self-contained, moving and speaking slowly, his expression and visible traits made on Claire only a negative impression. She had tried more than once to get hold of him; find out what he cared for, if he cared for anything at all; whether he had decided preferences for anything or anybody; whether even business were a passion with him; and she had always felt compelled to give it up as a hopeless task. Sometimes it seemed to her that there must be another, a real entity, hidden within his large white carcass, which

emerged in other surroundings — at the office of the factory; if not there, somewhere else — never at Ninth Street; and if that she could see him at such times she would see the real Edward Nicholson. As if somewhere he really lived, but that at Ninth Street he kept up only the semblance of living, and that behind his heavy face with its drooping mustaches he was occupied with constant secret thoughts of that other, that real life of which no one knew.

Edward was seated before an office desk which stood in a corner of the room by one of the windows, in a desk chair which turned on a screw and tilted back when you wanted it to. George was sprawling in an armchair at one end of the desk.

"Come in and shut the door," Edward answered; "we've just been talking about him!"

Claire drew up a chair, and both Edward and George looked at her interrogatively and yet with an expression which seemed to indicate that they were prepared to disagree with her beforehand.

"Is there any special reason why Jamie should keep on at the office, uncle?" Claire began.

"He can't live in idleness," Edward answered; "why should n't he keep on there?"

"He does n't like it."

"He does n't like it because he's lazy, but it's the best thing in the world for him, if he would stick to it."

"He is n't fitted for it, Uncle Edward."

"He is as fitted for that as for anything. He's the

kind of boy who is bound to go to the bad, I'm afraid! George has just been telling me. I knew he hated to work, but I never dreamed that he was dissipated. You may as well tell her, George."

And George proceeded to.

"I've known it for some time — friends have told me who've seen him around in different places. I've spoken to him about it a dozen times, but it has n't done any good. You and Mallette thought I waked everybody up on purpose the other night, and it's true. I had kept it from them as long as I felt that I should, and I thought it would be a good chance to prove what I wanted to say about him. People don't usually face things like this'soon enough, and before you know it Jamie will be a first-class souse!"

"But what can we do?" asked Claire.

"Make him brace up and behave himself!" George answered.

"How?"

"By telling him if he does n't behave we'll have to take some drastic action."

"Have n't you told him that already?" Edward asked.

"Well, yes, I have," replied George.

"But if you've already threatened him and it has n't done any good — " said Claire.

"Well, let Uncle Edward try his hand at it!"

"I don't believe threats ever have the slightest effect on people," Claire answered.

"Then what are you going to do about it?" George demanded.

Claire took the plunge

"Uncle Edward," she began, "Jamie has acquired his bad habits because he is unhappy and restless. He is n't fitted for a business life; he says he's tried and tried to understand it and to interest himself in it, but that it's absolutely hopeless; he does n't and can't like it; but there's one thing he does like and that's music. He loves it. He's been going to the office for three years now and has never learned anything, and yet in music, although he has never had any real instruction at all, see how nicely he plays, and some of his compositions are really lovely. That's his bent; he loves it; why not let him make it his profession — let him go to Paris —"

At mention of Paris Edward made a movement as if to interrupt her, but Claire went on:

"Wait a moment, please! In Paris —"


"Send a boy with *his* habits to a place like Paris!" Edward insisted on saying.

"Paris," Claire began again, "is n't as bad as you think it is."

"What do you know about it?" retorted George.

"Everybody knows what Paris is," Edward answered.

"But there are temptations everywhere, Uncle Edward; and I'm sure that the way to avoid them is by having something to do which you love. And another thing — they don't drink there as we do here, strong drinks —"



"They say that every other Frenchman is an absinthe fiend!" George interrupted.

"That's absurd, George," answered Claire almost angrily. She felt that she was making not the slightest headway. "Why not let him try it, Uncle Edward? Let him try it for a year. He loves it so, and he has real talent! I'm sure if you let him he would be so grateful that you would never have to worry in the least about him. He can pay his own way, of course, so that there would be no extra expense about it."

"He can pay his own way if I approve," Edward replied in his deliberate way. "You understand that I am the trustee of all your property which I can do with as I see fit, even to withholding the income from it."

"I don't mean to say that he would do anything you disapproved of. I am asking you to let him try."

"What do *you* think, George?" said Edward, turning to him.

"I don't care," replied George. "If it was only something else, something useful, it would n't be so bad, but to want to be a musician — it's just like Jamie — the damned little fool! Besides, he'd probably get tired of it inside six months!"

"He would n't, George!" cried Claire. "I *know* he would n't!"

Edward swung around in his chair and fixed Claire with large, expressionless gray eyes.

"It won't do; he could never make a cent at it!"

"Perhaps not — that does n't matter."

"Does n't matter?" asked Edward in surprise.

"He has enough to live on," said Claire.

"He has a pittance, two thousand a year. Is he going through life on that — did you ever hear of a musician or an actor or a writer or a painter who ever made any money?"

"Some of them must make a living," answered Claire.

"I tell you it's absurd. Money is the standard of everything. It sets the value of everything, and if a man can't make money it shows he's no good. No artist ever makes money because what he produces is n't worth anything. All these critics and painters and spouters and writers, what good are they? Can you tell me of one who has ever made a fortune?"

"They do, uncle," Claire argued, although she knew that they were getting away from the point. "Some of the opera singers make thousands of dollars during a season."

"Lord! Jamie an opera singer!" exclaimed George in disgust.

"I did n't say he wanted to be —" began Claire vehemently; but Edward interrupted her.

"There do seem to be a few who make money, but they're foreigners who have been brought up to it. Nobody has any opinion of them. No, Claire, it is n't practical. If Jamie will attend to business and keep straight I'll do this next year: I'll send him on the road —"

"Well, if you do *that*," George interrupted, "good-

night! You know the reputation commercial travelers have for boozing!"

"Oh, uncle!" cried Claire. "Jamie of all people as a commercial traveler!"

"Well, then, we'll find something else for him to do. And, Claire, try to avoid impracticable ideas; your mother was a little inclined that way, and Jamie is, too, I'm afraid, and there's nothing in it. There's one way to live in this world and that is to work hard, take care of your property, increase it if you possibly can, and let all idealists and spouters and impractical people alone. They're no use to themselves or anybody else! This idea of sending Jamie to France is out of the question. Do you suppose I would consent to his being exposed to the temptations of Paris without any one to look after him? I would n't be willing to have such a step on my conscience."

Claire stood up.

"Then there is no chance for him to go?"

"The whole idea is impracticable," Uncle Edward answered with an air of finality.

Claire went upstairs and knocked at Caroline's door. Jamie was waiting results in his room, but she was not ready yet to report to him. Uncle Edward's refusal seemed so unfair and unnecessary! Why was the idea impracticable? It had not been impracticable for all those thousands of students who, coming from the ends of the earth, were already in Paris! Why for Jamie?

And as soon as she had closed Caroline's door, she

asked her, almost challengingly: "Can you see any reason why Jamie should n't go to Paris to study music if he wants to?"

Caroline, wearing her spectacles, was sitting by a window reading the Sunday paper.

"Well!" exclaimed Caroline, looking up. "What next! I see every reason why he should n't! He won't work; that's what's the trouble with Jamie."

"But why should n't he go, Aunt Caroline?"

"Look at the temptations!"

"Look at them in New York."

"He has his home to go to here! Why, I was just reading an article in the supplement of the paper about the gay life of Paris. Now that the war is over they're beginning it again. Kate just took it, and to think of Jamie's coming home dead drunk! Edward would have rather seen him in his grave, I'm sure. You know how we've always felt about intemperance and the stand we've always taken in the church about it. You did n't really mean it, did you, about going to Paris?"

"Yes," answered Claire. "I've just been asking Uncle Edward to let him go."

"Well, I know what *he* would say. Nonsense! Nonsense! Tell Kate to show you that article! And, by the way" — Caroline lowered her voice. "Do you really think that Mr. Mallette is the only son of the rich English family of that name?"

"I'm sure of it," answered Claire.

"What makes you sure of it?"



"He told me so himself!"

Caroline's sound sense would ordinarily have excluded such testimony, but something — perhaps the weight of Mallette's own personality — inclined her to accept it.

"I think I'll drop him a line, thanking him for bringing Jamie home, and ask him to call — You like him, don't you?"

"He seems very nice," Claire answered non-committally.

"I suppose Jamie knows where he lives?"

"Yes, he does."

"Well, get his address and I'll write him. And stop this nonsense about Jamie's going abroad. I'm surprised at you; besides, you know how strict your uncle is."

Claire, realizing the uselessness of even another word with Caroline, knocked at Aunt Kate's door, and went in.

Aunt Kate was sprawling on a lounge in a corset and chemise, absorbed in the supplement in question. She seemed to be reading with avidity, and Claire caught glimpses of a large illustration showing bearded gentlemen in evening clothes and top hats seated at tables, on which stood champagne bottles and glasses, with ladies in décolleté, in a place hung with Chinese lanterns, watching a furious frolic of dancing going on in the center of the floor where numerous masculine and feminine legs were waving in the air. Kate folded the supplement and said: "Jamie seems all right again."

"Oh, Aunt Kate, I don't know what to do about him!" answered Claire, forced into a spontaneous outburst of disappointment. "Uncle Edward and Aunt Caroline can't seem to understand that Jamie is n't exactly like the rest of us. They say he does n't work hard enough — and what they mean by work is anything except what you want to do if that happens to be out of the ordinary. They may be right as far as the average young man is concerned, who has n't any especial preferences, but they can't see that Jamie is fitted for and loves just one thing, and he wants to and will work at it, and that he *does n't* want to and *can't* work at keeping books or being a salesman or running errands or the things he does at the office. It seems so hopeless. Jamie wants to go to Paris and study music, and they think the idea is so stupid — although thousands of other people do it — that they won't even listen to it."

"To Paris!" Kate cried in surprise, but with no note of disapproval. "They 'll never consent, Claire. For one reason because they would think it stupid, and for the other, Edward would refuse in order to punish him for getting drunk. You know how strongly he feels about it."

"Do you see anything so dreadful about the idea?" Claire asked.

Kate shot a glance at her out of her dark eyes and answered:

"They 'll never consent, Claire."

"I shall try again, though!" Claire responded. And going out she encountered Maggie who had a note for her. Claire took it and recognized Helena's writing. The note, Maggie said, had just arrived and required no answer.

Kate sat on her sofa for a moment after Claire had gone, absorbed in thought, picked up the supplement once more, gazed at it abstractedly, and then, getting up, crossed the room, turned the key, and unlocking a door in the lower part of her writing-desk exposed a row of French novels bound in yellow paper. Selecting one of these, she picked up a French dictionary, and returning to her sofa began with the aid of her dictionary its laborious translation.

Jamie was sitting on the edge of his bed smoking a cigarette.

"Well?" he asked, as Claire entered.

"Not much luck, Jamie," she answered as cheerfully as she was able and she sat down beside him.

"That's all right," answered Jamie, although he could not prevent an expression of disappointment from crossing his features. "I knew you would n't have."

"But we must n't give up hope. This is the very first time we've tried. I'm going to ask Aunt Adelaide to help."

"Aunt Adelaide! You know what Uncle Edward thinks of *her*!"

"But if he finds out that it does n't seem unpractical to other people, he may change his mind."

"And to-morrow that damned treadmill again!" Jamie got up as if in desperation and seized his bedroom clock. "For two cents I'd shy this through the window!" He looked fiercely at Claire, then restored the clock to its place, and smiling his sweet smile as if to reassure her, sat down beside her once more.

Claire threw her arms around him.

"Oh, Jamie, you're so good! Try to hold out; somehow we'll manage it."

"If I only had control of my money!" Jamie exclaimed. "Did Uncle Edward say anything about it?"

"Yes, he said that he need n't pay the income if he did n't want to. Did you know?"

"Yes, George told me! What I ought to do is to cut loose like Mallette! What do you think of him, Claire?"

"You mean his story of the works and his quarrel with his father?"

"Yes."

"I don't know yet. It seemed awfully — awfully revolutionary — and wild — I don't know. You have to get used to ideas like that, I suppose."

"It was splendid, *I* think! Think of being able to look at a thing absolutely from one angle and to shut out everything else! That's what Mallette did. He did n't allow any side issues to interfere, no ifs and buts! He tackled the thing and settled it once and for all. I admire power of that kind more than any other because I have n't got it myself, Claire. If I had I'd say good-bye to the whole outfit, and by hook or by crook do what I want to

do. Do you remember Wagner and how he accepted money and favors from all sorts of people without a second thought, as a matter of course, in order to do what he wanted to do? That's what I ought to do, but I'm not strong enough. I'm a poor sort, Claire —"

"You're not, Jamie. I won't have you say so." Claire embraced him once more. "You're good and sweet, and just because you are I'm going to find a way to send you abroad! Let's see what Helena has to say!" And opening her note she glanced through it and handed it to him. Jamie read:

Dear Claire, — Won't you and Jamie dine with me and Mr. Orville at the Ritz to-night at eight? Mr. Orville says he has apologies to make to both of you. He owes another one to Mr. Mallette, and I enclose a note from him to Mr. Mallette inviting him, too. If you can come, please ask Jamie to deliver it to him, and telephone the result. Do come. Mr. Orville is really awfully distressed about what happened the other night.

Lovingly

HELENA

P.S. Please try to induce Mr. Mallette to come. Mr. Orville feels so badly about it. Mamma will chaperon us, which will make six.

"Do you want to go?" Claire asked when Jamie had finished.

"With that boulder!" answered Jamie. "No, thank you!"

"You never met him until the other night, Jamie!"

"Once was enough!" answered Jamie with decision.

"What unnecessary dislikes you do take to people!"

"Did you like him?" Jamie demanded.

"I did n't like the way he treated Mr. Mallette," Claire answered, "but that may have been partly George's fault. Except for that I *did* like him."

"Do you want to go?" Jamie asked.

"Yes, let's go. You'd rather do that than have supper here, would n't you?"

"Lord! I should say so! All right. But about Mallette?"

"Has he a telephone?"

"Yes."

"Then telephone him. Tell him we are going, and say I hope he will come too. You've just got time before church!"

At this reminder Jamie's face fell.

"Church!" he exclaimed so lugubriously that Claire could not help laughing.

"You must, Jamie. You've stayed away too often lately. You know Uncle Edward does n't like it — and now especially!" And she looked at him with an expression of soft meaning.

Jamie responded to it at once.

"All right" — and he started for the door — "I'll call up Mallette."

"See that the door is shut tight," Claire warned him, referring to that of the telephone closet, "and we'll just say that we're dining with Helena; we need n't mention the Ritz. Uncle Edward would n't approve."

Jamie descended the two flights to the main floor, Claire watching him over the banisters, and disappeared

into the closet under the stairs which did duty both as a telephone booth and as a repository for Maggie's tools of trade. She saw that he took the precaution of tightly closing the door. Presently he emerged and came up again.


As he approached, Claire called, "Is it all right?"

"Yes," answered Jamie in a slightly guarded voice. "He'll be there!" And coming into the room he added, "But, I say, we'll have to dress!"

Claire's face fell. She knew that the Ritz in evening dress of a Sunday night could only be encompassed by stealth, a thing she shrank from; but seeing Jamie's answering look of disappointment she said:

"All right, we'll manage it! Bring your overcoat upstairs and put it on up here. I'll wear a hat and a jacket. We'll tell Maggie as we slip out."

At this moment they became aware of the voices of Kate and Caroline below, and immediately they heard the solid tread of Edward descending the stairs. It was time to start for church. Claire hastily put on her hat, and meeting Jamie at the door they went out together. Edward, Caroline, and Kate, the former in a frock coat and silk hat, worn only on Sundays, were disappearing around the corner into Sixth Avenue. They followed, keeping a certain distance behind their elders, and in a moment George caught up with them and passed them hurriedly with a gesture of greeting and farewell. He acted as usher at their church, but secretly disliked the job and was waiting for an opportunity to get rid of it.



Claire and Jamie arrived as a last perfunctory note or two sounded from the bell, and passing George, who was standing in the middle aisle near the vestibule wearing a suitable expression of solemn deference, which caused Jamie even in his present state of depression to greet him with a derisive leer, they paused at their pew while Edward, who always sat next the aisle, stepped out to let them enter. The usual service followed during which Jamie's restlessness, as it always did, attracted occasional glances from Caroline.

At a certain interval in the service Edward left the pew and proceeded down the aisle as did two other gentlemen in frock coats and kid shoes, and being handed silver plates lined with velvet proceeded to take up a collection while the organist played a dreamy accompaniment of suitable solemnity. Following this came the sermon, so long that it reduced Jamie to despair, although he had heard not a word of it, and following this the entire family returned to Ninth Street just in time for dinner, which on Sunday was served in the middle of the day.

An afternoon of intense boredom followed. Claire wondered why. The same sun shone, the same blue sky stretched itself above, the same buildings surrounded her, but to-morrow an electric transformation would take place and life would tingle once more with incident and opportunity.

At seven she and Jamie, issuing from their rooms, descended the stairs cautiously, their evening clothes cov-

ered with the customary day garments of the street. They sought Maggie stealthily, informed her that they were going out to supper, and, shutting the front door with absolute noiselessness, started for the Ritz.

CHAPTER VII

CLAIRE NICHOLSON had a sensation that night, which grew as the evening wore on, that these two men, Mallette and Orville, who had come simultaneously into her life, were destined to remain in it, to exert powerful and diverse influences on her, to call into play her own abilities, and once more that premonition renewed itself that life, strange, beautiful, grotesque, was about to open for her.

Adelaide, Helena, and Orville were waiting in the palm room when she and Jamie arrived, and almost instantly Mallette appeared. Although Orville had intimated through Helena that he had three apologies to make, it struck Claire, immediately after reading Helena's note, that she could n't well see how he was to make them without creating an awkward situation, but Orville managed to convey them simply and easily by a frank friendliness of manner, so unaffected and natural that Claire, instantly ready to wield the cudgels for Mallette, was disarmed at once. Mallette himself responded perfectly, and within the orange glow, all their own, of the candles resting on their table a little hour of sensuous happiness followed for Claire.

But, happy though she was, Claire, prepossessed by that new, strange, and fascinating sensation, watched and compared Mallette and Orville.

Orville looked more prepossessing in his evening clothes, she thought, than he had when he had appeared at Ninth Street as George's guest. His long, strong face showed a clearer, more ruddy complexion, and his rather coarse hair, already tinged with gray, was brushed as carefully back from his temples as was Jamie's own. He looked fresh and fit, and his strong wrists and the contour of his shirt-front over his chest gave indications of a powerful frame.

Indeed, Orville's personality radiated power: his way of sitting, his voice, his manner of speaking, his confident and assured laugh, and his alert and direct gaze; the power of impetus and of strong blows, of action, and of the unremitting application of physical and mental energy.

Orville's force of character was a thing of which Orville proclaimed himself fully conscious, but Mallette — and one could not help feeling that he too had his share — seemed unaware of his.

Mallette had one of those English faces which, when compared with the later prevalent American types, give the impression of a more finished and a finer race. Orville seemed stronger; Mallette more active. Orville was magnetic with mental power; Mallette attracted by a more subtle charm. Orville put the world to the test of his ambitions; Mallette viewed life from a more impersonal stand. Orville was like the strong glaive of Richard; Mallette the bright steel of Saladin. But it was to Mallette Claire felt that she inclined. She found that she

liked Orville and his compelling and not unpleasant ego, but sitting beside Mallette she was conscious that there was between her nature and his a harmony similar to that which bound herself and Jamie so strongly together. Similar and yet different.

"Oh, the dickens!" Jamie exclaimed suddenly, "I forgot to tell Maggie we would n't be home in time for prayer-meeting!" And he chirruped like a bird so cheerfully that Orville laughed heartily. Claire, still strong with religious inclinations, gave him a protesting glance. Orville suddenly grew sober.

"When I was a boy, everybody went to church," he hastened to say, "and the Brooklyn ferry-boats used to be crowded with people going over to hear Beecher! New York was a big provincial city then."

"It's provincial now, it seems to me," Claire answered.

"But very cosmopolitan, don't you think?" Orville asked.

"But it does n't seem cosmopolitan, because nobody here mixes together! That seems provincial. There are all kinds of nationalities here, but we never see them! Some of them must be worth while, too!"

"Do you suppose Helena would think of asking anybody to call who did n't wear the right kind of collars? Horrible, horrible!" Jamie cried.

Helena squeezed Jamie's hand; but Adelaide, slightly annoyed, answered, "You love to tease just as much as ever, you naughty boy!"

Adelaide was continually looking about her, somewhat ill at ease. Helena had pressed her into service, but she was not happy. If Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Slade, for instance, and others of that set, had been Orville's guests, the table occupying the mathematical center of the room would have been none too good, and she would have expanded harmoniously in the refulgence of greatness; but as it was she had been relieved to find that their seats were in an inconspicuous corner, and she had unostentatiously followed the others, managing not to see in passing a pair of undesirables who were manifestly waiting for a bow, and even forbearing to attract the attention of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Slade themselves — who were present, as luck would have it — on account of the really questionable appearance of their party. Claire, handsome enough in her way, but without the least vestige of social position and quite unknown to anybody, Jamie ditto, and a strange Englishman. Orville was the only one who was at all worth while, and his desirability was still only potential, being so barely on the ragged edge that Adelaide was still not quite sure as to what course she intended to pursue with him. Really Helena's craze for having people spend money on her did sometimes lead her to do foolish things. On one never-to-be-forgotten occasion she had actually taken tea with a fabulously rich Jew. She had told her mother afterwards that the thought of his money had made it absolutely impossible for her to refuse.

Aunt Adelaide, not to waste the evening entirely,



tried without much success to catechize Mallette, to Helena's manifest amusement. Indeed, Helena was in a mood she displayed only rarely, when Adelaide knew that she could do nothing with her — an occasional tempest of reckless gayety; and when Helena after dinner proposed a Broadway cabaret, Adelaide, partly because she knew it would be hopeless to protest and partly from a sneaking desire to visit one of those places, consented, provided Helena promised not to stay more than half an hour. Helena gave her promise without the slightest intention of keeping it, when Claire upset everything by saying she thought it time that she and Jamie were going home.

"Oh, no!" cried Orville resolutely.

"Yes, really," said Claire.

The idea of going to a Broadway cabaret at any other time would have attracted her, but on a Sunday night she felt it would be impossible even at the cost of apparent rudeness to the others.

"But it's so early!" Helena cried, and her mocking glance seemed to make plain the secret of Claire's reluctance — to Orville, at any rate, for he answered quickly:

"Let me suggest something else. Won't you come to the Plaza and see my new rooms? The decorators are just out, and I moved in two days ago. We can have coffee there, and Nicholson might give us a little music."

Helena hesitated only for a moment, and then, reflecting that Orville's apartment would give evidence of a

recent lavish outlay of money and so gratify her consuming passion, agreed pleasantly, while Claire thought, "How kind of him to act so quickly and so thoughtfully!"

Orville penciled rapidly a note on his card to be telephoned to the Plaza, and going out they got into his limousine, Adelaide experiencing a slight attack of discomfort in the dressing-room on seeing Claire don a street hat and cover her evening dress with an ordinary jacket.

This limousine was typical in a way of Orville.

It was a type of limousine more expensive than any other type in the world. A footman whose livery, matching that of Orville's chauffeur, proclaimed that he, too, belonged to Orville, opened the door for them. Adelaide, Helena, Claire, Mallette, Jamie, and, last of all, Orville, got in. They found themselves in a small room, yet so large they were not in the least crowded. The limousine was the last word in elegance, convenience, and comfort; and yet, unless the most expensive thing of any kind is inherently vulgar, it was not ostentatious. Claire had not dreamed that there could be cushions so insolently soft, as if they were soft merely because they chose to be, knowing well how costly they were. There were little receptacles for negligible things, mirrors, lights, and elegant utensils, velvet carpets, superb little curtains, and two armchairs, one for Jamie and one for Mallette. As Adelaide, Claire, and Helena had taken and were comfortably filling the back seat, Orville was left apparently

without one. It seemed for a moment as if this paragon of motors was to reveal itself unable to meet even a usual emergency; but no, for on Orville's pressing a button an additional seat detached itself from the upholstery and obligingly and noiselessly arranged itself for his comfort. He sat down on it, the door closed with a sound from the latch, a kind of rich click, which seemed to say, "You'll never see a lock like me again," the footman took his place beside the chauffeur, and the car began to glide away with a perfection of motion absolutely foreign to Claire's experience. There was something so extraordinary and overpowering about the luxury of this machine that for the moment all, even Adelaide, were abashed by it, but only for a moment, for under its tonic influence Helena's spirits rose still more sharply, and even Claire, nestling into the cushions in her corner, sighed happily to herself, "How good it must be after all, to be so very rich!"

The car turned majestically up the Avenue, and as if moving on air bore them swiftly and soundlessly to the Plaza, where before its momentum had completely ceased its door swung open under the hand of the chauffeur's companion. Orville helped the ladies to descend, and preceding them into the corridor led the way to a waiting elevator. The door of the elevator clanged shut, they shot upward, clanged open, they got out, and facing them Orville's door was being held for them by still another of Orville's functionaries. Helena's delight was increasing each moment, and all

entered with a hush of anticipation. The functionary, with an agreeable smile of welcome, helped to remove their wraps and opening still another door ushered them into a large room. In a huge fireplace, with a flue at least fourteen stories high, blazed a fire, made of freshly kindled cedar logs, and a group of easy-chairs were disposed around a table bearing an array of liquors, of very good fragrant fresh coffee, and of cigars and cigarettes, so expensive as to be quite unknown to the ordinary consumer.

Helena insisted on being shown Orville's rooms immediately and a hurried tour was made of them. She had become quiet suddenly, and her usual cloying, artificially sweet manner had returned. The apartment proved to be what every one instinctively knew it would be, perfect in every detail, as perfect as the machinery of Orville's superlative limousine; but Claire, remembering Mallette's description of Aunt Adelaide's, could not help thinking that it would apply more appropriately to Orville's abode than to hers. No convenience which human ingenuity could think of to induce people to spend money was absent, down to a dressing-table in one of his bedrooms containing an assortment of cosmetics and ladies' toilet articles, a library full of books, a large table covered with magazines, and a profuse array of flowers, all, however, arranged with cold and rigid precision. It seemed as if they might have a moment before registered below and been shown to one of the hotel's finest suites only just vacated by

some one else, so impersonal was its finery. Claire remembered that Orville had said he had only been living there for two days, but wondered whether after two months it would have changed so very much. Still, it might very well be that this was a characteristic common to the dwellings of all bachelors.

After coffee, Helena did a little adroit maneuvering which resulted in Adelaide, with singular docility, finding herself seated at the library table looking at the colored plates of a book on Oriental rugs, a subject in which she was not in the least interested; in Jamie — with a cigarette between his lips — swaying once more to the sound of his own waltz issuing from Orville's grand piano; in Helena herself occupying a sofa with Mallette in a distant corner of Orville's parlor, and in the said Orville being left to the attractions of Claire, a thing he particularly wanted. Claire saw through all this quite well, but did not object in the least. In fact, she was pleased rather than otherwise, not for being paired with Orville, but because it would give her the opportunity to observe Helena's behavior with Mallette, and perhaps discover the explanation of her embarrassment on the afternoon she had lunched with her, but she had about come to the conclusion that it was simply one of those infatuations Helena was always indulging herself in, and her display of confusion a pose by which to give the affair an added dash of piquancy. She doubted if Mallette was taking any part in it.

As soon as Helena, having completed the disposition

of her mother and Jamie, had, in the company of Mallette, left them to themselves, in the vicinity of the fireplace, Orville said:

"And now I want to set myself right about the other night. I really had n't remembered meeting Mallette before. If I had, I hope you don't think that I would be so rude as to ignore the fact." And then, as if this sentence might condemn George, he added: "With George it was different. Mallette had been brought into your house without George knowing anything about him and without his having probably much confidence in your younger brother's judgment. I'm not trying to excuse him; I am simply offering an explanation."

"I think that is probably the true one," Claire answered.


"And you will forgive me?"

It struck Claire that it was Mallette who was most concerned, and she said so.

"I'll make it all right with him," answered Orville; "but what I am most anxious about is that I should not have done anything which you might disapprove of. I really did not remember him. You will believe me, I hope."

"Of course I will believe you," Claire answered, thinking that Orville was perhaps making too much of her approval or disapproval, "Why not?"

"For a special reason," Orville answered; "some-time I will tell you." He hesitated, and then went on: "No, I will tell you now. I am a good judge of charac-



ter, if I have an opportunity to study a person's face even for a moment, if he is unconscious that I am doing so. This appraisal of mine I find to be almost always correct, and impresses me so convincingly that sometimes I have seen people, total strangers, whom it has made me want to know. Do you know how I happened to dine at your house the other night?"

Claire, with a sensation of embarrassment, answered, "No."

"Because the moment I saw you, when you passed us going uptown on the top of the stage, I determined to know you. Imagine how pleased I was when I found that you were George's sister. It made it so easy."

Claire felt herself flush at first, and hoped that it would be hidden from Orville by the glow of the flames, but in a moment a realizing sense of the complete impersonality of Orville's manner reassured her.

"Good friends, disinterested friends are rare. When I find such friends I will return their friendship in good measure. You will probably think what I am saying is peculiar, but you will admit that it is honest. I am going to ask you if I may call, and I am making it plain why I want to; I want your friendship. May I come to see you?"

Claire answered, "Yes," hardly knowing what else to say even if she should wish to.

"I have other friends," continued Orville, "men and women. I believe in friendship; as a power it is more valuable than almost anything else."

"I should never imagine that *you* would feel the need of it," Claire answered.

"I don't in the ordinary way, but to be strong and successful you must have strong friendships. Or perhaps I might say that to people with strong natures strong friendships are a necessity."

"Then you think that they are not necessary to most people?"

"Most people are not capable of them."

"George?"

"To be frank, no, although George is an able fellow."

"Aunt Adelaide?" wondering why she should be impelled to discuss her with a stranger.

"No."


"Helena?"

"Perhaps."

"Mr. Mallette?"

"Mallette!" — with a manner which indicated that Mallette had probably never occupied so much as twenty seconds of his thoughts — "Let me see," and he looked over at him.

Helena and Mallette were seated partially facing them on a sofa which stood in a corner of the room. Mallette was looking out of the window toward Fifth Avenue and speaking evidently of something they had been looking at, a building, a group of persons, or the general view, and as she spoke Claire saw that Helena's glance, instead of following his, was resting on his face.



Orville waited for Mallette to turn, and presently he did so, to Helena, who instantly averted her gaze.

"He would be capable of friendship, I should say," Orville remarked after a moment. "Good-looking fellow, but you can't tell about actors and people like that. Too light-headed! Peculiar eyes, though! Do you know anything about him?"

"Not much; he comes of a good English family." She wished to talk of Mallette, but for some reason forbore.

"They all do, of course," responded Orville with a careless laugh, and instantly dismissing Mallette he went on: "So if I can come to see you I shall be thankful. May I?"

Claire almost wished not to say "Yes," but in spite of herself she did so once more. Orville seemed so much older, so different, so engaged in things of which she knew nothing; why should he want to call on her? And yet his impersonal, almost brotherly, manner impelled her to accept what he had been saying at its face value.

Adelaide, noticing Claire and Orville through the library doorway, and deducing that Helena and Mallette must be sitting together somewhere, shut her book and came into the drawing-room. Helena, understanding perfectly from this that Adelaide had definitely rebelled against staying in the library any longer, and that she did n't intend to allow her to flirt with Mallette if she could prevent it, got up presently and, followed

by Mallette, wearing a slight air of relief, came over to the fireplace, but during the short interval elapsing between Adelaide's appearance and her doing so, a conversation had taken place between Adelaide, Claire, and Orville.

"What a charming young man Mr. Mallette is," Adelaide had said to Claire. "Helena said you had met him before. Do you know anything about him?"

"He's an actor, of course you know," Orville answered, Claire thought, rather mischievously.


"An actor!" Adelaide cried sharply. Her face instantly took on a hard look, and she glanced at Mallette vindictively as if saying to herself, "Then what earthly right has he to be *here*?" She half rose as if she had decided to go over to them, when Claire added hastily: "Yes, but he is the only son of the head of Mallette's, the great English jam manufacturers."

Adelaide sat down again, and immediately Claire saw a dreamy look come into her eyes, a look dreamily speculative, instantly quenched on noticing that she was under observation.

"A son of Mallette's, eh?" Orville remarked contemplatively, and Adelaide asked in very much the tone of voice George had used:

"Then what on earth is he doing on the stage?"

"Perhaps he likes it," answered Claire, "I see in the papers that Sir Joseph Beecham, a son of the great English pill manufacturer, is conducting an opera season in London."



"But why has n't he told anybody?" persisted Adelaide.

"I don't know," Claire replied.

"I must say," remarked Adelaide, very much as Caroline had, "I do like that in him! The English are n't given to blowing their own trumpets the way we Americans are —" And at that moment Helena and Mallette joined them.

Adelaide suddenly seemed to have grown younger, and prettier. Her manner toward Mallette which had previously been compounded of an almost hostile curiosity and indifference, was now so flatteringly friendly that it seemed as if she herself might be willing to flirt with him if he wanted her to. Claire thought that he shot at herself a glance of half-humorous inquiry, as if asking her for an explanation, and Helena was plainly puzzled by her mother's sudden change of front.

On saying good-night to Orville they found that his limousine was waiting to transport them home, and as Adelaide and Helena lived north of the Plaza and Claire, Mallette, and Jamie south of it, it was decided to drop the former first. Adelaide asked Mallette to call with real cordiality, and Helena, though still puzzled, stepping out and revealing a length of leg encased in a stocking of thin silk, seemed to say on general principles to the world at large, as she smiled her smile of artificial sweetness, "Behold, I am smooth and beautiful. Would you not like me? If you are rich enough, take me!"

The door clicked to richly once more, and Orville's

car, containing Claire, Mallette, and Jamie, began a stately progress down the Avenue.

For a time they sat in silence, but presently Jamie exclaimed, "*I think we need some exercise.*"

The same wish, it seemed, had occupied the others, and after they had stopped the car by blowing through a tube into the chauffeur's ear, they descended at Forty-Second Street. The peculiar ghastliness of a Sunday evening in New York lay around them, something hushed and deadly, as if in all the buildings behind the curtained windows, hidden by the walls, many people, deprived of the occupation of either making money or spending it, lay gasping in the clutches of a horrible ennui, waiting for sleep to bridge the few remaining hours which separated them from their cherished pursuits.

Claire had a confession to make to Mallette, so she began:

"Did you want to keep who you really are — I mean who your family is — secret, Mr. Mallette?"

"Not especially — one way or the other. Why, may I ask?"

"Because I told Aunt Adelaide and —"

"It does n't matter," Mallette answered; and although he betrayed nothing Claire felt that Adelaide's change of attitude was made clear to him.

"And I told Aunt Caroline, too. I think she has written you and asked you to call — I mean," she corrected herself, as if she had associated Caroline's writ-

ing to him and her knowledge of his family connections too closely, "I mean that they were n't really annoyed about" — Jamie was on the other side and could n't hear her — "about the other night."

To her surprise Mallette did not answer at once; he seemed to be weighing something, coming to some decision, and Claire, without knowing what it portended, its purpose or its content, waited for him to speak, and as she waited he turned and looked at her suddenly, and said:

"Then I may come? You would like me to?" And as he spoke she saw a light of eagerness, almost of supplianee, in his curious, smiling eyes. Once more Claire said "yes," and as with Orville her answer seemed fraught with an unusual significance.

"It's rather lonely sometimes in a strange country — one longs for friends," he added after a moment.

"Yes, do come," Claire repeated. "Did I tell you that Friday is my day? Come in next Friday if you can." And speaking again so that Jamie could not hear, "I would like to talk with you about —" and she made it plain by an added significance of expression that she wished to speak about Jamie, thinking, "How strange that both he and Orville should have used that word!"

It was quite late when she and Jamie let themselves in. The fact that the outer door was closed indicating that the rest of the family were at home, they climbed the stairs warily, and bade each other good-night; but

presently Jamie appeared in Claire's room, saying guardedly:

"Orville is n't so bad. I thought he was a first-class rotter at first. He's got a splendid piano. Well, here's for another week of grind," and he yawned ruefully.

Claire put her arms around him and hugged him tenderly. "Hold out for a little while, Jamie. We'll manage somehow!"

"All right," answered Jamie, "good-night." He started for the door, stopped, and then returned. "But it was funny, Orville's dining here with George the way he did. What on earth could Orville have wanted of George? And what on earth can he want of such an enormous suite of rooms — one man! Lonely, I should say, wandering around in them all by himself."

"Have you ever heard of him before, Jamie?"

"Oh, yes; I've heard of him often, and seen his name in the papers, but I did n't think when he came here with George that it could be *the* Orville. He's got so much money they say that he does n't know what to do with it, but he won't stop making it on that account. Those people in Wall Street are a funny lot. Their life seems to me like sitting down at a roulette table as soon as you are old enough to begin and staying there — except for meals — until you die and are carried off. I can't understand it. Of course it would be nice enough to be able to have a car like Orville's and to have a suite of rooms big enough to get lost in if you wanted to, but if that's all you get out of it! Well, I suppose

he'll marry and take his wife there — that's what *I'd* do. I could n't stand a place like that all by myself — well, good-night, Claire."

Claire undressed slowly. Jamie's words had set her imagination at work, and she saw Orville wandering in his spacious, brightly lighted rooms or sitting by his fire, even that made more costly with its cedar logs, surrounded by all the cunning snares of luxury, alone in solitary splendor. She turned out her light and raised the shades. The tenements were dark except for the windows of one lighted room. Claire stood in her night-dress, watching. The woman she had seen in bed suckling her baby was now walking the floor with it, in a kind of squalid undress. Her place in bed was empty, but on the inner side of it two children lay asleep. These from their long hair she could tell were girls, but cross-wise on a mattress on the floor lay two boys and the man she had noticed the night before smoking at the window; she could see his swarthy face, his tousled hair, and the dark tints of his unshaven jaw. They had not undressed — except that they had removed their shoes, revealing their torn and ragged stockings, and lay in attitudes of discomfort, while the woman, the light striking the sallow surfaces of her skin as she approached it in her walk, paced to and fro with an air of one struggling against weariness and an overpowering desire for sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

EDWARD, George, and Jamie had all left for business when Claire reached the dining-room on the following morning. Edward and George always took the Elevated at Eighth Street, which gave them an opportunity to glance through their papers. Jamie, if he got up early enough, walked across Washington Square and down West Broadway, the office being in the wholesale dry-goods district not much more than a mile to the south.

Kate had not yet come down, and Caroline immediately began:

“Do people have dances on Sunday nights now?”

“Not that I know of — why?” Claire answered.

“I don’t know why people should wear evening clothes on Sunday unless they were going to a dance. You are n’t getting tired of our old-fashioned ways, too, are you, Claire?” And Caroline fixed her with her sharp, handsome eyes. Claire knew at once that her aunt had inspected her wardrobe after they had gone out — Jamie’s, too, perhaps — to discover what she had worn. This expedient seemed so simple that Claire wondered that she had n’t thought of its possible use; not that it mattered very much now.

“Mr. Orville, the man who came to dinner with George the other night, was taking Aunt Adelaide and

Helena to dinner at the Ritz, and he asked Jamie and me to go, too, and Mr. Mallette. We did n't want anybody to know because we were afraid you might not like it," Claire replied.

"We should n't have; don't let your uncle know. Why did n't George go? He sat around here the whole evening."

"He was n't asked."

"Well, I never!" Caroline exclaimed. "And Mr. Orville his friend! Better not tell him. I don't know what we're coming to," she went on, seemingly from some hidden reason for perturbation. "Sometimes I think you can't trust any one these days, even those who are supposed to carry the righteous fear of God in their hearts. As for the others! well, they seem to think that *anything* is right as long as they want to do it!" She looked at Claire, and for the first time Claire noticed those slight indications of disintegration which begin to appear with advancing years. Her aunt, always so large, firm, and handsome, all at once seemed to show a wrinkle here and there, her flesh suddenly seemed softer, the texture of her skin had deteriorated; Claire saw her hand tremble, and looking at her eyes it seemed to her that they were suffused with tears. These phenomena in connection with her aunt were so absolutely novel that Claire stared at her in surprise, asking,

"Is anything the matter, Aunt Caroline?"

"The matter! Of course there are things the matter! Is n't Jamie worry enough, and now your running about

the way you do? I'm sure I don't know why you can't understand the responsibility you are and try to help us!" And she got up, pushed her chair under the table, and disappeared into the back hall. Claire saw her presently ascending the stairs, an unprecedented thing, as at this hour she always went down to interview the cook, and decided that she had gone up to bathe her eyes; but she somehow doubted Caroline's statement that she and Jamie were the cause of her agitation.

Maggie came in bearing an egg-cup on a plate. This egg-cup, which was of plain white china and which was shaped something like an hour-glass except that one end was larger than the other, consisted of two receptacles of different sizes joined together. The smaller was for holding a single egg upright in its shell, the larger for having eggs broken into it. Into the larger receptacle Maggie had emptied two soft-boiled eggs, American fashion, and this, with its supporting plate, she now placed before Claire with a bump. Because of some congenital inability to gauge properly the distance between the table and the approaching dish, Maggie had a trick of bumping things down.

After putting down the egg-cup, she proceeded to pour Claire a cup of coffee, bumping that down, too, at the right of her plate. Claire consigned two lumps of sugar to its depths, added a dash of cream, helped herself to a piece of hot cornbread from a plate which Maggie, reappearing, had just bumped down, and then, noticing that the morning paper was lying dormant be-

side Caroline's place, she reached over for it and began reading it luxuriously while she slowly consumed her breakfast. After the strenuous experiences of the past three days, and still influenced by the relaxation of sleep, she viewed with fortitude the prospect of the empty week which faced her, the more so as she was unaccustomed, by training, habit, or education rather than by any inherent predisposition, to fixed habits of industry, and was completely dependent on the small duties she herself created to escape from that sense of aimless boredom with which so many women are afflicted.


Claire finished her breakfast, and, carrying the paper with her, passed through the library into the parlor, and seated herself in an armchair which stood in the embrasure of one of the windows. The window was open, and that first balmy hint of spring still warmed the air. After the listless despair of Sunday the street basked in the hopeful contentment of a Monday morning. A slight clatter of dishes came from the rear of the house, but presently the rolling to of the sliding doors which led to the dining-room shut these sounds out and a period of quiet followed. The house was still, and in the street only an occasional pedestrian passed with an air of leisurely enjoyment.

Presently, diagonally across the way the door of Mr. Weston's house opened, and Mr. Weston himself came down the steps — a thick blond young man with a small blond mustache and a head of thick blond hair

on which was perched a smallish Hombourg hat. Mr. Weston was the individual mentioned the morning before at the breakfast table who annoyed Edward by not paying his rent. He taught vocal culture and gave lessons on the piano, and at times Claire and Jamie had stopped to listen to the sound of a robustious voice issuing from his house to the accompaniment of a piano which had plainly seen better days.

Mr. Weston, as he passed the Nicholson house on the opposite side of the street, gazed so persistently up at its windows that Claire, screened by the dark green cast-iron railing of the balcony which crossed the house on a level with the parlor floor, watched him, wondering if anything of an unusual nature was attracting his attention; but almost at once Mr. Weston's face expanded into a gallant smile, and, still looking up, he removed his hat with an elegant gesture. Claire was surprised, but applying herself instantly to the solution of the mystery she perceived that the angle of his upward glance indicated that he was looking at Aunt Kate's windows, and as she had not yet come down, it must be with Kate herself that he was exchanging greetings, greetings, moreover, of a startling character of friendliness.

Mr. Weston passed out of sight, and immediately a door closed above and some one began to descend the stairs. Claire raised the paper and became absorbed. The steps reached the first floor and were passing the parlor door when they stopped abruptly. Claire, behind



her paper, could almost see that Kate, discovering that she might have been a witness of Weston's salute, had paused for a moment in consternation. Claire did not move, and Kate continued her journey to the dining-room without speaking and without claiming her right to the newspaper which Claire was holding. To Claire this was the most convincing proof that Kate had been seriously disturbed by finding her in the parlor.

This incident, although of passing interest, made no great impression on Claire and by the time she had finished the paper, had receded into an oblivion, whence it was to be called only by later events. Leaving the paper in the chair she had been occupying, she now ascended to her room, and getting out various articles of apparel she sat down by a little workstand and began mending them, assuming immediately that peculiar attitude of domestic absorption characteristic of all women when engaged in similar occupations. At such times women rarely think, nor did Claire, but occasionally, when her hands holding her sewing rested for a time on her lap and her eyes lifted themselves contemplatively, one could have seen that her mind was once more at work. She was thinking carelessly of a variety of things, of certain purchases she intended to make, a hat or two, some summer gowns; of the wretched family she had seen the night before; but most of all of Jamie and the problem he presented. She was not very much troubled by it, because, although she knew well enough that care and patience would be needed, she hoped that her in-

fluence now that she was forewarned would easily save him; but what harrowed her conscience was the fact that she should have never noticed things which must have been there for the noticing had she not been too dull or too preoccupied with her own affairs or too naïve to understand them; and during all that period of easy blindness on her part Jamie had been getting in deeper and deeper.

From the family no help could be expected. Their attitude toward Jamie would be one of dour watching, which would arouse resentment on Jamie's part and make her task more difficult — it was n't going to be easy; and she was glad that Mallette was coming in on Friday so that she would have some one to discuss it with, and after all, with the optimism with which people regard almost all such cases, no doubt it would all come right in the end.

Half an hour before luncheon-time she put on her things and went for a brisk walk, leaving the house again immediately after luncheon for an afternoon of shopping. At five she took a bus to its terminus at Washington Square, and from there walked down to meet Jamie — this had been agreed on the night before — under the metallic clatter of the Elevated and through the odors and noises of the untidy street. Presently she saw his trim figure advancing with its cheerful, lively step. He was swinging his stick gayly, and on perceiving Claire he waved a welcome with one of his inimitable waggish gestures which always

made Claire laugh. They locked arms and started north together.

"Did everything go all right to-day, darling?" Claire asked.

"Tip-top! George did n't turn up" — George was in a broker's office in the "Street" — "and I always get along better the days I don't see him — Whew, what a racket! Let's hurry out of this!" And quickening their pace they reached the Square and began crossing toward Fifth Avenue.

"I say, Claire," Jamie began suddenly, "what do you suppose?"

"Well, what?" replied Claire.

"You must keep this absolutely to yourself," he added impressively.

"All right; what is it?"

"Uncle Edward had a call from a lady to-day!" he announced with a significant air.

"What of it, Jamie?"

"You ought to have seen her!" Jamie whistled.


"Pretty as a picture, but — well, *you* know!"

"But, Jamie, she might have —"

"I know," Jamie interrupted; "she might have been a buyer for an uptown dry-goods shop, or a drummer, or she might have been soliciting subscriptions for woman's suffrage — only she was n't — I'm no fool, Claire. I'll tell you just what happened. You know our offices take up the whole first floor and the entrance to them is in the center of the building at the front. You've

been there, have n't you? Well, at the side there's another entrance which you take when you want to get to the stairway leading to the upper floors. Nobody ever uses this entrance because the upper floors are vacant, and there's no way of getting to it from our place except that Uncle Edward's office has a door leading into it — although until to-day I did n't know that he ever used it. Well, I'd been out to lunch, and as smoking is n't allowed in the office, and as I had n't finished my cigarette, I went in to the side entrance and sat down on the bottom step to finish it — ” Jamie interrupted himself to say ruefully, “I'm a prize, Claire, for getting myself into trouble with the family! — I had n't been there two minutes when the door leading to Uncle Edward's office opened part way and the lady slipped out. I was sitting right opposite, and as I looked up I saw Uncle Edward inside and he saw me, but he did n't say a word, but jerked his head back and shut and locked the door as quick as anything. The lady gave me a look as if she kind of knew who I was, and out she went — and, Claire, she was awfully pretty and awfully well dressed, but — well, *you* know. You could have knocked me over with a feather! Of course, Edward will be more down on me than ever now!”

Although Jamie told his story in his usual casual, not to say flippant, manner, Claire saw that he had received a shock as if some element of faith, which even if unformulated, all men cherish, had been upset for



him. Jamie's experience had plainly proved, he believed, that Edward was not what he pretended to be. Claire wondered whether he had been given a glimpse of the real Edward which she had thought at times must exist somewhere, but whom she had never been able to find, and a sinking sensation, as if something were giving way beneath her feet, as if she had received a dizzying blow, caused her to walk in silence, and suddenly she remembered Caroline's expression at breakfast, her perturbation, her swimming eyes, and wondered if the real reason for them lay in what Jamie had been telling her.

Claire, without knowing why, believed what Jamie believed — to her horror — and an awful realization confronted her that in the future there would be hidden in the house in Ninth Street, away from the world, a disgraceful and terrible secret, to which she would be a party. Edward's secret! And Jamie's secret! Poor Jamie had one, too. The simple machinery of life seemed to be becoming complicated and sinister, and recalling suddenly Mr. Weston's thick smile and the knowing quality of the flourish with which he had bowed toward Kate's windows, she wondered if Kate, too, had hers.

During these cogitations Jamie had walked quietly beside her, and as they had reached their door they went up, still in silence, each preoccupied and rather hushed, as if since morning the house had become permeated with a strange and subtly disturbing atmos-

phere. But as they were separating on the landing Jamie whispered:

"Let's dine out somewhere, Claire!"

"Oh, no, Jamie! We can't again, so soon! The only thing is not to take anything for granted and act as if nothing unusual had happened. After all, we don't really know. And we have n't any right to assume things, have we?"

About seven, therefore, the doors of Claire's and Jamie's rooms opened, as did Caroline's, Kate's, and George's, and the Nicholson family went down to dinner, to find Edward seated as usual reading the paper under the library chandelier. Strange as it seemed to Claire, Edward was precisely the same Edward he always had been; no more quiet nor talkative, nor preoccupied nor taciturn, nor facetious nor solemn, than he was wont to be. He betrayed no consciousness of having been discovered in any dubious situation, and his attitude toward Jamie showed no modification of any kind, bestowing on him a degree of favor not a shade more or less than usual; in fact, perhaps, rather less, owing to Jamie's recent escapade.

And yet to Claire the house was not the same.

Caroline had recovered from her agitation of the morning and conversation flowed as usual.

"And so Mr. Orville is Dudley Orville, the financier!" began Caroline. "Well! Well! You want to keep on the right side of *him*, George!" George had exploded a bomb the day before, no less potent than Claire's reve-

lation of the origin of Mallette. "Why did n't you tell us?"

"I thought, of course, you'd know," George answered.

"I wondered what he dined with George for?" Jamie hazarded.

"Why should n't he?" Edward demanded; and George retorted, "Because I asked him to!"

Jamie decided not to pursue the subject, but Kate went on with it by saying: "There is n't any reason why he should n't, but why did he? George is only a clerk in a broker's office, while Mr. Orville is a well-known capitalist."

"Say financier," suggested George. "I'm not sure whether he's in the capitalist class yet or not. There's quite a difference. And as for his coming here, I'll tell you the exact reason!" George seemed in splendid spirits, so evidently so that Jamie could n't help asking, "What's the matter with you? Made some money on the Street to-day?" thereby directing to himself, from Edward and Caroline, certain disapproving glances which seemed to say, "Since disgracing yourself the other night, it would be more seemly if you did n't have so much to say for yourself!" And Jamie subsided once more.

"He came," George went on, "because he thinks I may be useful to him!" Which was n't the exact reason at all — partly, perhaps; but George knew that Orville had liked Claire's looks, and while quite content that it should be so, did not intend to let it lessen his own

importance, with Orville, the financier, in the public eye.

"I must say," Caroline observed, "he seemed very democratic for such a wealthy man!"

"He's got a splendid piano!" Jamie's voice was heard once more. He stopped abruptly and was seen to be tremendously absorbed in his dinner. But the acute George, after a moment's silence, demanded, "How do *you* know?"

Jamie cast a despairing glance at Claire.

"Well, Jamie, you *are* a fool!" This from Caroline; and Claire, realizing that there was no help for it, informed the table of their engagement of the night before. The news plainly flabbergasted George and reduced him to a wondering silence, with which the heavy disapproval of Edward's manner seemed to mingle.

This was broken presently by Edward himself, who, turning his light grayish-green eyes on Jamie, asked him, "Did you drink anything there?" referring to their dinner at the Ritz.

"Of course I did n't, uncle. Ask Claire!"

"Do you think that is the way to help your brother to avoid temptation?" Edward demanded of Claire; and, without waiting for an answer, he asked Caroline whether she had known where they were going.

"No; Claire told me this morning. There's no use crying over spilt milk, so I was n't going to say anything about it!" Caroline explained.

"Very well, then," Edward answered; "I did n't ex-

pect much of Jamie, but if Claire has n't any better judgment than to go to places like the Ritz with him — on Sunday night, too — I shall have to forbid your going anywhere of an evening without my permission."

This ultimatum caused Claire to flush, and Jamie to turn sulky.

Edward presently finished and descended to his basement room as usual, Caroline and Kate disappeared, Kate upstairs and Caroline into the lower regions, and Claire, George, and Jamie found themselves alone in the drawing-room.

"It's funny he did n't ask me!" George at length remarked gloomily.

"He'll probably ask you next time," Jamie observed generously. "Besides, you could n't have gone, anyway. You're an usher on Sunday nights."

"Oh, shut up!" answered George. "Did he say anything about me, Claire?"

"Yes, he did," replied Claire. "He said you were very able."

"Did he?" exclaimed George, highly mollified.

"I told you he wanted something of you. Next time I'll try to find out what it is for you," said Jamie.

"There won't be any next time for *you*," George retorted with ominous significance.

"Why not?"

"Did n't you hear what Uncle Edward said?"

"I'll go if I want to," Jamie answered resentfully.

"You'll be a fool if you do!"

"No, Jamie, you mustn't," said Claire. "Promise!"

But, Jamie wearing his stubborn expression, sat down at the piano and began to play.

This was Monday. On Tuesday nothing of special note occurred, nor on Wednesday; but on Thursday night Jamie did not come home to dinner. This flagrant inattention to Edward's definite command cast a shadow over the meal and destroyed Claire's appetite. Caroline wondered fretfully and audibly what had become of him, and Edward maintained a silence loaded with significance. Claire went to her room immediately after dinner, but descended almost at once and rang up Mallette. To her relief, and a little to her surprise, his voice presently answered her. He had seen nothing of Jamie. Claire had feared that Jamie might be repeating his performance of a previous night in Mallette's company.

Claire again ascended the stairs.

At quarter-past ten Caroline and Kate came up to their rooms; at half-past, George's door closed; and a little after eleven Claire heard Edward's heavy tread. Claire took up a book and sat down prepared to wait for Jamie's arrival, but almost at once she heard Edward's voice below, and an instant later recognized Jamie's. He must have closed the front door, when he came in, too softly for her to hear. Claire stepped into the hall and listened. Jamie, on one of the lower steps of the stairs leading to their floor, was explaining his

absence to Edward, who was standing in his doorway, Jamie, in an apparently sober voice, so far as Claire could tell, was recounting how he had met a friend who had tickets for the opera — a performance of “The Secret of Suzanne,” which he particularly wanted to hear — and who had invited him to go provided he dined with him first. Jamie explained that he had not thought that there was any harm in just dining on short notice that way, and he had accepted, intending to telephone after dinner and ask if he, Uncle Edward, objected to his attending the opera. In fact he had telephoned, but had been told that the Nicholson number was busy — had tried twice, in fact, with the same result, and could not do so again without being late for the opera. Upon Edward’s asking him why he had n’t taken the trouble to telephone between the acts, he replied that it had n’t occurred to him.


Edward listened to this explanation with an air indicating that he would have to think it over before deciding whether to accept it or not, and, turning, disappeared into his room.

Claire waited by her door, and as Jamie came up, beckoned to him, but Jamie, with a shake of the head, put a finger to his lips, pointed downward, and with a smile which seemed not exactly like Jamie, went into his room and closed the door. Claire stepped into the hall, and looking down saw the possible reason for Jamie’s gesture — Edward’s door stood slightly ajar. And yet — never before, during all their lives, even from

their earliest days, had Jamie rebuffed her. A sadness, an overwhelming depression seized her, and as she stood there it seemed to her that there came to her nostrils, but very faintly, a trace of that smell, that odor of drink, which had first — that night when she had found him with Mallette — revealed his condition to her.

Claire undressed and got into bed. There was nothing to be done — perhaps, even, everything had happened precisely as he had said, and she realized that palpably to doubt him, when he was really telling the truth, would, where Jamie was concerned, be the gravest of mistakes. *She*, at all events, must not. Certainly, his story was in itself not at all improbable. He said that he had tried twice to get the house — the first time might easily have been the moment when she was talking to Mallette, and although she could not remember that the telephone had been used again, everybody knew how often Central made mistakes. As for forgetting to try again between the acts, that was so like Jamie, when under the spell of music, that it seemed to stamp with indubitable verity the whole tale.

And yet, Claire doubted — tried not to doubt, yet doubted — and doubting fell into an uneasy sleep.



CHAPTER IX

MALLETTE called on Friday afternoon and for a number of following Fridays. Orville, too, began to call, always in the evenings. As Mallette's evenings were occupied with the exception of Sundays — when he occasionally dropped in — and as Orville never called on Sunday evenings, they did not meet.

It was seen at the Nicholsons' that Claire had two assiduants of a character quite different from the neighboring boy friends of her adolescence, and they derived a certain pride from the fact, to which they gave expression by occasional jokes at table at Claire's expense. Claire did not mind; on the contrary, the fact that two mature admirers had become obvious enough to arouse their comment rather pleased her, and if it had not been for her concern over Jamie's future and certain other things, she would have been quite happy.

The manner and the circumstances of Claire's intercourse with each were quite characteristic. Claire's days never produced more than a caller or two, and as the season advanced, even these failed her. Friday afternoon, therefore, usually found her in the drawing-room alone with Mallette. They would sit quietly, each drinking a number of cups of tea, discussing, amicably and in a perfectly impersonal way, the things which interested them and then Mallette would go away.

Claire knew instinctively that there was an element of daring in Mallette's character, and the contrast between this known quality and his quiet, almost controlled, manner when with her aroused in her speculation and a little amusement. But with Orville, how different! Once or twice a week the bell would ring, Orville's strong voice would be heard in the hall, and looking out one would see Orville's superlative motor, with its aspect of noiseless and quiescent power, standing motionless by the curb. Orville would come into the parlor with his assured laugh, chaff Aunt Caroline a little if she happened to be there, filling the room with the radiations of his strong and vital personality. But he was always restless, and presently jumping up he would bundle Claire into the motor with Jamie, or George if he happened to be at home; or even Aunt Caroline, as chaperon for a ride through the Park or up Riverside, always insisting on a stop somewhere, at some restaurant, where they would sit listening to the music long enough to eat an ice, but not longer, when Orville would be ready to be off again. But he was always gay, with a chaffing, impersonal, paternal air which Claire liked.

The Nicholsons belonged to that old generation of New Yorkers, of which many still exist here and there, who have never owned country places, who prefer New York at all seasons, and who, if they leave it at all, do so by going sometimes during the dog-days for a week or two to a hotel — at the seashore or in the mountains.

July, therefore, still found them at Ninth Street.




Caroline was talking about taking Claire to the White Mountains sometime in August, but the others seemed indisposed to leave. Indeed, Edward and Kate had not spent a night away from home for ten years, except that Edward absented himself at regular intervals to visit the button factory. George and Jamie took what change of air they wanted in occasional visits to near-by beaches, and George, in addition belonged to a suburban golf club with some pretensions to smartness.

On the fifteenth of May painters appeared in response to orders from Caroline, the window shutters were brought up from the cellar, and, supported on empty barrels in the back yard, were given their annual application of dark green paint. On the twenty-second they were hung at all the windows in the house, to be ready for use in case the hot wave which often arrived during the end of May should make its appearance. As soon as it was seen that the warm weather was indubitably at hand, the shutters began to be manipulated with classic regularity. All must be closed throughout the house upon rising and must remain so during the day. A certain latitude as to the adjustment of slats to admit light was permitted, but the shutters themselves must be kept closed as if they belonged to the carapace of some large animal to which the blaze of summer was inimical. During the hottest hours of the day, the windows too were shut, and under these rigid regulations, on the observance of which Caroline insisted, the interior of the house resembled a cool, dark

cavern withdrawn from the arid blaze of the summer sun.

But as evening approached, and as the glare of day began to wane, the raising of windows could be heard, the sound of shutters being thrown open and catching in their hooks as they collided with the brick walls of the house. The front door would stand ajar, secured by its chain bolt, and the casement windows of the drawing-room would be pushed back by Maggie during her post-dinner progress of the lower rooms. The sound of water running into or out of tubs would be heard, and presently the Nicholsons, bathed and freshly clothed, would gather in the dining-room to assemble around a table less brightly lighted than in winter. In the library one gas-jet only burned in the chandelier, and in that of the drawing-room none. The lamps, too, were dispensed with, as giving out too much heat, and only the lights in the side brackets were maintained. After dinner Edward would descend to his sanctum, where in the dusk, periodically illumined by the glow of his cigar, he might be dimly distinguished seated in his shirt-sleeves, motionless, as if lost in the depths of some secret preoccupation. So it had always been.

So, too, was it the habit of Caroline and Kate to retire, at an earlier hour than in winter, to their rooms, where, removing their corsets, they would sit by their windows languidly waving palm-leaf fans, and so, too, did the habits of the younger generation, fortified by the vitality of youth, remain unchanged. Jamie would



sit at the piano, Claire by one of the drawing-room windows, while George was likely to be off somewhere in pursuit of one of the many purposes with which he had already begun to fill his life.

So the routine of the Nicholson family went on as formerly, but to Claire it was no longer the same. Under the glazed surfaces of its smoothly flowing current, she had begun to fear that elements of danger existed whose nature she could comprehend only in part, and she had begun to realize, too, under the influence of her confused forebodings, the complicated nature of man. These entities around her — Edward, Caroline, Kate, George, even her darling Jamie — were resolving themselves, under the stress of circumstances and of Claire's maturing eye, into complicated personalities charged with all manner of undreamed-of potentialities, and were demanding more thought of her, as if they had suddenly revealed themselves as difficult riddles requiring solution.

Before dinner one evening, as she sat alone in the drawing-room, she heard Jamie come in and go up to his room. She saw him through the partly open drawing-room door as he ascended, and something about his movements and the sound of his footsteps, which lacked their usual elasticity, caused her to go up after him. She knocked and called to him, and with a voice muffled by the sound of water splashing in his wash-basin, he had answered her, but had not opened his door. Claire went into her room to wait for him, but

presently, as her clock struck seven, she went down to dinner.

"Where's Jamie?" Caroline asked, as Edward finished carving. "Has n't he come in yet?" Continuing, as Claire answered in the affirmative, "Maggie, go up and see why he does n't come down!"

Maggie went up, and her voice could be heard faintly from above, calling "Misther Jamie! Misther Jamie!" interspersed evidently with rappings. After a longish wait, during which her absence disorganized the usual procedure of dinner, she returned, saying that he would be down presently. There was another wait, and at last, when dessert had been almost reached, Jamie came into the room. Claire knew, before she had even looked at him, by some process of intuition, that something was wrong, and only hoped that the others would not notice it. He sat down, glancing quickly and, Claire thought, half defiantly, around the table.

"Will ye have some soup, Misther Jamie?" This from Maggie.

"No, thank you."

The voice was abrupt and slightly muffled, not Jamie's voice, and Claire saw that George was looking at him intently. No one else, however, seemed to be aware of anything unusual.

"Did n't you hear the gong?" Caroline asked.

Jamie's answer was not quite intelligible.

"What?"

"I say I was reading!"

"Oh! Well, your dinner will be spoiled. Don't you want some soup? Maggie will have it heated for you?"

Again a response which could not be distinguished.

"What?"

"I said, no, thank you!"

Claire dared not look at him directly, but she was aware that he was leaning back in his chair, in an exaggeratedly easy pose, and that his fingers, twisting the stem of his goblet of water, were turning it round and round as it stood on the table. Kate made some observation which aroused a general conversation for a moment, but presently, during a period of quiet, Jamie's voice rose, saying,

"Say, Claire! Did you know that Mallette's a great admirer of yours? He says —"

"Never mind, Jamie," Claire answered as casually as she could, and yet flushing in spite of herself.

"Wait a minute!" returned Jamie, with an air of obstinacy, "I want to —"

There was evident in his speech a slight thickness which began to attract attention.

"Oh, shut up!" George cried. "Nobody cares what —"

"Wait a *minute!*" Jamie repeated with irritation. "He says —"

"Oh!" A sharp exclamation interrupted him, and Caroline jumped up from her chair shaking her skirt. Jamie had upset his goblet and the water was running into her lap. George emitted an exclamation of annoy-

ance and disgust, and looked about him at the others with an expression which seemed to say, "Well, what did I tell you!" Jamie's color had heightened, and in a voice whose articulation was now unmistakably thick, he began to apologize. Everybody looked at Edward, who was looking at Jamie fixedly.

"*You'd* better go upstairs!" he commanded at last with an air of finality.

"All right!" answered Jamie, more thickly than ever. He got up, looked defiantly around the room once more, and went out.

"Well!" exclaimed George with exasperation. "There you are! What are you going to do about it?"

But nobody seemed to know.

A cure was suggested, but while each member of the family shrank from recommending it to Jamie, and thereby branding him to his face as a drunkard, all from Edward down felt it necessary to scold him severely, even Claire.

Claire's encounter with him took place the following morning. She had had breakfast and for an hour had been sitting in the drawing-room with the newspaper, Kate for some unknown reason having risen early and gone out immediately after breakfast.

He had descended the stairs and gone into the dining-room, whence issued for a time the sound of desultory exchanges with Maggie and the occasional clatter of a dish, but presently, having evidently completed his breakfast, he came quickly down the hall and into the

drawing-room plainly under the impression that it was empty, for on seeing Claire he stopped with a faint exclamation of surprise and a sudden accession of confusion in his manner. Claire sprang to her feet, avoided him by a wide detour, and without a word made for the door, but as she reached it he cried "Claire!" with an accent so despairing that her heart seemed in that instant to turn fluid. Controlling herself, she stopped and faced him.

"What do you want?" she demanded, flushed and scornful.

"Claire," he repeated, looking at her miserably, and sinking on to the piano-stool he folded his arms on the piano and dropped his head upon them, saying presently, his voice muffled in the sleeve of his coat, "I'm so unhappy!"

"Why should *you* be unhappy? You do what you like. You make us unhappy, but why *you* should be, I don't understand!"

"I *don't* do what I like!" Jamie cried almost hysterically, jumping up and clenching his hands fiercely. "I tell you I don't!"

"Why do you do it, then?"

"How do I know? Do you suppose it's because I want to?"

"Then, when you stop, I'll begin to believe once more that you care a little about me, Jamie!"

Jamie began pacing excitedly up and down, saying over and over, "I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead,"

when suddenly with that emotional calculation which is woman's second nature, Claire began to cry. Sinking into Caroline's chair which stood by the small table she began to cry, pressing her handkerchief tremblingly against her eyes. And at the spectacle of her abandonment Jamie stopped abruptly. From an access of subjective commiseration she had drawn him quickly to think only of herself, and almost at once she felt his arms encircle her shoulders.

"Claire, please, please! I love you so!"

"You don't!" she answered between her sobs.

"I do, I do, Claire!" he repeated imploringly.

"You don't! You only think about yourself! If you did n't you would have seen how unhappy you've been making me!"

"Don't cry, Claire! Please, please don't cry! I swear I'll never do it again! Please, please!" And under the stress of his entreaties Claire gradually grew calmer. Jamie would have taken her in his arms, remembering that first strong embrace here in this room after Claire's first discovery, but now she would not yield herself. She was forgiving him, as she must let him know, only in so much as he might deserve that forgiveness in the future, and Jamie understood.

Claire had not relaxed her efforts to induce Edward to allow Jamie to go to Paris, but she had been quite unsuccessful. She had attempted to carry out a vigorous campaign in Jamie's behalf, but had been unable to arouse the slightest interest in any one. Aunt Ade-

laide had promised to speak to Edward about it, but had never done so, and when Claire had mentioned it to him again, going down into his sanctum one summer's night, he had sat silent while she had marshaled her arguments only to ask a question at the end so irrelevant as to convince her that he had hardly heard her.

"But, uncle, you have n't listened!"

He let himself down heavily, having been tilted back in his office chair, his cigar glowing and paling alternately.

"Yes, I have. It was about Jamie, was n't it?"

"Yes, about his going to Paris."

"No, no! Nonsense! Out of the question!" As if from the recesses of her immature brain she had propounded something too futile to be worthy of a serious answer.

Only one offer of help materialized and of that she could not avail herself. Kate had said to her:

"Mr. Weston — you know — the young singing teacher who lives across the street — says that Jamie ought to go by all means. He feels so strongly about it that he said he would speak to Edward himself if I wanted him to."

"Do you know him, Aunt Kate?" Claire asked.

"Slightly! He's very talented. Do you think he could help?"

"I don't think uncle likes him," Claire answered.

"He does n't pay his rent or something, does he?"

Kate made an impatient gesture.

"Your uncle never *will* understand some things!" she answered.

"Well, yes — " replied Claire doubtfully; "but if he *ought* to pay it and does n't — "

"He does n't think of such things! He's so preoccupied. You should hear his exposition of Wagner. It's simply wonderful. He's going to be a great man some day. Would n't you like to hear him?" And Claire answered, politely, that she would.

This conversation took place in Claire's room late one afternoon. From across the way the ceaseless racket of the tenements came to her borne on occasional languid waves of an atmosphere impregnated with the odor of warm soapsuds and of sour rags. Claire suddenly drooped under a feeling of exhaustion. In two days August would be there, and she had not yet had one breath of country air. From behind the screen of tenements from the street beyond, soaring above the dull roar of traffic, rose the long-drawn cries of itinerant vendors. She looked at her clock. It was half-past five. That passive hour of late afternoon had arrived, which must somehow be occupied. The evening paper would be lying on the hat-rack, and if she went down at once she would have time to look at it, as she often did, folding it again neatly and returning it to its place after she had finished with it. As she began to descend the stairs she looked down and saw Kate — who had just left her — in the lower hall making for the telephone closet, and, as she lifted the paper from the hat-rack,

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Kate's muffled voice could be faintly heard in conversation with some one.

Claire went into the drawing-room and seated herself in a chair which stood by one of the windows and which was hidden behind the keyboard of the grand piano. As she read, the front door opened, and at the same moment Caroline came swiftly through from the library, slid the double doors to sharply after her, and going to the doorway leading to the hall called imperatively:

"Edward!"

Edward's heavy step had just begun to mount the stairs, but he turned without a word and entered the parlor, and as he did so Caroline pushed the door shut with a crash behind him, and cried, in a voice trembling with a kind of accusative violence,

"Edward Nicholson, I want to know what you are doing with my money and the money of the Nicholson family!"

Claire realized immediately that she should let them know that she was there, but for the moment the violence of Caroline's manner completely paralyzed her, and as she sat, momentarily helpless, Caroline, as Edward had not answered, spoke again, still more aggressively, and yet — too — poised on the verge of tears.

"I mean to know! What are you doing? Are you ruining us?"

Edward, white and heavy as usual, had at first stood motionless as if dazed by the fury of her unexpected

attack, but now he answered in his customary manner to which were added tones of a quality either of fear or ingratiation,

“Why, Caroline, what do you mean?”

Claire, by this time having herself in hand, jumped up, made her presence known with a word of apology, and started for the door, but after a moment's startled realization on the part of her uncle and aunt, Caroline cried:

“Stay where you are, Claire. This concerns you as much as anybody. Edward Nicholson, *you* know what I mean! What are you doing with our money?”

“But, Caroline, I *don't* know what you mean!”

Edward stood heavy, stolid, and expressionless, but Claire thought whiter than she had ever seen him.

“You don't? Listen. Why is the interest on the mortgage on my houses across the street more than six months overdue?”

Edward hesitated for the fraction of a second, and then answered, “I—I don't know—I—Roscoe attends to that!” Roscoe being an old up-state employe at the factory.

“Roscoe! He never used to.”

“Well, I know, but we've been so short-handed downtown.”

Caroline was plainly unconvinced.

“If he made out the check, you'd have to sign it, would n't you? You have n't given him a power of attorney?”

"No, but I have to sign so many, I would n't remember."

"Have n't you had any notice that it was overdue?"

"No."

For a moment they looked at each other eye to eye, and then Caroline cried once more: "Edward Nicholson, I've got these children to protect, and myself, and I am going to telephone Robinson Elder that I want to see him at once!" Robinson Elder being the family lawyer.

"But that's nonsense, Caroline. I tell you it's all right. Look here, I'm going to the factory to-night by the night train and I'll telephone you the first thing in the morning after I've seen Roscoe. If he has n't attended to it, I'll see to it at once. There's nothing on earth to worry about."

"What time will you telephone?"

"At eleven o'clock."

"When will you be back?"

"The following morning."

"Very well; I'll wait until eleven to-morrow. But, let me tell you, when you get back I intend to have the whole condition of the Nicholson estate explained to me."

"Very well," answered Edward. And he turned slowly and carefully as if the retention of his equilibrium was a question of the nicest adjustment, groped for a moment for the doorknob, turned it, and went out. He headed for the basement stairs, but before he was fairly

through the doorway, Caroline cried after him, as a parting shot, "And, Edward Nicholson, I know more about you and your private life than you think I do!"

To this he did not answer, and they heard the stairs creaking under his heavy carcass as he descended.

"What is it, Aunt Caroline?" asked Claire under her breath. "Are you afraid he has lost money?"

"I don't know, but I'm afraid," Caroline answered, "terribly afraid. When George comes in, tell him I must see him. Don't let him go out again without telling him."

"Very well," answered Claire; "I'll wait here for him."

Caroline, whose agitation was now becoming tearful, went upstairs, and Claire returned to her chair by the window to wait for George's return. She tried to read, but could not.

The iron gate of the basement shut cautiously below, and Edward Nicholson emerged from the area and through the fading light disappeared in the direction of Sixth Avenue. This seemed strange to Claire, because in looking at her watch she saw that it was nearly seven, the hour for dinner. Maggie's gong sounded and still Claire sat waiting, but George did not come, Jamie hustled in, Kate returned a little later, and presently, Caroline, Jamie, and Kate descending, she joined them at table.

"Where's Mr. Nicholson, Maggie?" Caroline asked.

"Oh, he said you were n't to wait. He had some busi-

ness to attend to and might n't be back. He's going to the factory to-night."

"I did n't hear him packing his bag," remarked Caroline in some surprise.

"He went without his bag," Claire said.

This mysterious behavior on Edward's part seemed to Caroline and Claire fraught with an inexplicable and yet disturbing significance, the idea of Edward's going to the factory without his bag seemed so utterly beyond the bounds of possibility; and timid and uncertain, with that sheltered, feminine timidity most women are burdened with, they waited anxiously for the arrival of the shrewd and capable George. But George did not come. Orville was to have called and taken Claire and Jamie to a roof-garden, but soon after Claire had gone upstairs Maggie came up with a message. Orville had with many apologies asked to be excused. Certain business emergencies which could not be evaded would keep him occupied until very late.

Claire heard Jamie at the piano below trying something over and over, probably a new composition of his own, and went down to tell him that Orville would be unable to keep his engagement. Jamie said he did n't care; nor did Claire. That exhaustion, which had made itself felt before dinner, weighed on her more heavily than ever, and returning to her room she undressed at once and got into bed.

It was not yet half-past eight. Through her open windows from beyond the rampart of tenements came the

roar of traffic, and with it the lights and sounds of the tenements themselves. And yet, rested by the softness of her bed and the sense of secure withdrawal her room afforded her, a feeling of tranquillity and safety began gradually to steal through her, hidden away in the soft darkness of her room, with the tenements beyond the yards, beyond them the city, and beyond the city the seething world; and yet she could not sleep.

The strange, unaccustomed notes of the little reedy instrument which she had heard once before, floated out from some window of the tenements, steering its way lightly among the discordant sounds surrounding it like some small buoyant boat floating among the rocks and currents of a turbulent stream. How like it sounded to the piccolo of the Frenchman's symphony heard so long ago! How happy she had been that day! Ah, how sweet life had looked to her that afternoon, how sweet! As she began to sink gradually to sleep, she was aware that Jamie had come up and had entered his room. Presently she heard him leave it, close his door, and go downstairs. She waited for him to come up again, fighting against her drowsiness, but he did not come, and by degrees the thin, halting strains of the pipe and the clamor of the city died away.

CHAPTER X

ON coming down to breakfast the next morning Claire found Kate already there. Caroline had just finished and was getting up. Jamie, it seemed, had gone out the night before, returned very late, and had gone out again in the morning long before breakfast without saying a word to anybody. As for George, he had not been home at all, nor had anything been heard of him. Owing to George's orderly nature it was conjectured that he would not stay away without good reason, although his failure to return at a time when his presence was wanted caused Caroline no little concern; but Jamie's action in going out before breakfast gave rise to immediate criticism, it being suggested by both Kate and Caroline that he was taking advantage of Edward's absence to indulge his reprehensible proclivities. But to this Claire would not agree, arguing that the very fact that he had returned at all should reassure them.

Caroline, looking as if she might have passed a sleepless night, got up and went into the drawing-room carrying the newspaper with her, saying that she must see George and would telephone his office a little later.

As she went, Kate, in a rather louder voice than usual, said to Claire, "Are you doing anything this morning?"

Claire replied in the negative.

"Because if you're not, I'd like you to help me pick out some materials for a dress at Arnold's."

"Very well," Claire answered, glad of any suggestion which might serve to occupy her; "what time?"

"At ten," Kate answered, very loudly and distinctly.

At ten, therefore, they started toward Fifth Avenue, and, as Claire took for granted, a bus, but when they reached it, Kate, to her surprise, proceeded up the Avenue to Tenth Street, and, turning into Tenth Street, began walking hurriedly toward the west.

"But, Aunt Kate —" Claire began.

"Sh-h-h-h," Kate answered, a prey evidently to the furtive excitement of some secret adventure. "We're going to Mr. Weston's! Don't you tell!"

Claire, astonished and annoyed, and yet piqued, too, by the sudden novelty of the situation, followed Kate, who was walking ahead so rapidly that she could with difficulty prevent the distance between them from widening still further. Kate's intention was plainly to continue to Sixth Avenue, return down it to Ninth Street, and approach Mr. Weston's house — which stood to the west of the Nicholson's — from that side, as offering a securer means of reaching it without being seen. She rounded the corner into Sixth Avenue hurriedly, Claire following, when with a start, she turned back so precipitately that a collision followed. Kate immediately sought refuge in a doorway, where Claire joined her, exclaiming, "What's the matter?"

Kate made a gesture toward the middle of the street

and Claire observed Caroline crossing in the direction of Jefferson Market.

"If she'd gone to the butcher's first instead of over there, she'd have caught us!" cried Claire resentfully, her curiosity turning to annoyance at being forced into a situation so undignified.

"Never mind," answered Kate reassuringly; "it will be all right as soon as she gets in."

"But if she is going to the vegetable man, he's on this side!"

"She never goes to him any more. She's going to the butter-and-eggs man, on the other side."

"I don't think it's safe."

"All right, then we'll go back the way we came. We've certainly time for that!" And Kate, leading the way, they turned the corner again and began hurrying back through Tenth Street toward the Avenue. At this point Claire's sense of humor came to her assistance, and she purposely walked slightly in the rear in order to give way to an irresistible impulse to laugh, which she did guardedly enough to prevent Kate's hearing her.

On reaching Ninth Street and the Avenue, Kate peered cautiously around the corner and finally hurried on again, passed their own house, across the way, with averted face, and ran up the steps to Mr. Weston's door. It was immediately opened for them and they were greeted by Mr. Weston himself. Kate entered hurriedly, followed by Claire, and the door was shut after them. Kate, out of breath and rather flustered,

presented Claire, saying, "This is my niece," whereupon Weston, seizing Claire's hand, made a low obeisance, said, "Won't you come in?" and led the way into the parlor, a long, narrow room sparsely furnished with a parlor "set" consisting of a sofa, two armchairs, and two small chairs all covered with red plush, a small, marble-topped table, an upright piano, and two pictures, one a crayon portrait of Mr. Weston in evening dress and the other a framed photograph of a group of pupils standing around a foreign-looking gentleman with a long beard who was seated at a piano. A black volume, marked "Scrap Book" in white letters, rested on the marble-topped table.

Mr. Weston looked as Claire's casual glimpses of him had led her to expect he would. He was rather short, rather plump, had a pale, colorless skin, a thick blond mustache, prominent, light blue eyes, thick blond hair, and shoulders liberally sprinkled with dandruff.

"Now, let me see!" Mr. Weston began immediately. "Perhaps you'd like to know a little about myself. This is a photograph of Professor Eysen, of St. Louis, the great vocal instructor, with his pupils, taken at the time I was one of them. That young man on the right hand is me. This is my portrait, taken at the time of my first public appearance, and these are some of my press notices, very flattering too, printed in the newspapers of various towns where I taught in the West. You see, I always had it in mind to come East finally, just as your brother has it in mind to go to Paris, as

Miss Nicholson has told me. Ah! — ” At this moment a smallish brown dog of obscure species came bustling in with an air which seemed to say, “Very sorry to be so late, but here I am at last!” placed his fore-paws on Mr. Weston’s knee, and immediately received a cuff which caused him to disappear rapidly under the sofa on which Claire and her aunt were sitting.

“Oh!” cried Claire involuntarily.

“That’s all right,” remarked Mr. Weston with nonchalance. “He’s used to it! Now, let me see! Perhaps you’d like to read some of these press notices, they are very — ”

“My niece is so anxious to hear your method of interpreting Wagner, Mr. Weston,” Kate interrupted. “She’s so fond of music!”

“Well, you see,” Mr. Weston went on immediately as if he had simply been shifted from one track to another without losing his momentum, “my idea is to bring an intimate understanding of Wagner home to everybody. People can’t be expected to understand Wagner unless he is explained to them — because why? Because he’s way over their heads! Take yourself,” continued Mr. Weston, looking at Claire. “What do you know about Wagner?”

“Well, not very much,” answered Claire with a mental reservation that she probably knew more about him than Mr. Weston thought she did.

“Exactly! And nobody can really understand him without an immense amount of study and a sound

musical education, unless they place themselves under the guidance of some one who has already pierced the veil!"

"But might they not like and appreciate him even without understanding him to the utmost?" Claire asked.

Mr. Weston's lips were parted to go on with his thesis, and a slight expression of annoyance revealed itself at this interruption; but Kate immediately answered:

"That is obvious, but what Mr. Weston is talking about is the appreciation which comes with knowledge, not the indiscriminate and faulty tastes of ignorance!"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Mr. Weston. "And in exactly —"

"Your own words," added Kate with a rather coquettish smile. "You see, my memory is a good one!"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Weston again. "My idea is to spread the appreciation of Wagner through knowledge. There you have it. Appreciation *through* knowledge!"

He stopped and looked at Kate. "Do you know, those three words ought to be the motto of our — of my — life. Don't you think so?"

"They embrace everything," Kate answered.

"Exactly! And now I will give you an idea of my method!"

Mr. Weston laid the cigarette which he had been smoking on the edge of the piano, where numerous other cigarettes had scorched it, and lifted his hands above the keyboard. He poised them as if about to pounce

upon the keys, then lowered them and looked at Kate and Claire, who were still sitting on the sofa, with a glance which was meant to be quick and searching. Kate and Claire remaining motionless under this scrutiny, he raised his hands once more.

"Act one. Siegfried. Vorspiel!" and he began to play, accompanying himself with a running comment of explanation and with an occasional outburst of song. "Motives sixteen and eighteen! The double basses, louder and louder!" Crash! "The cave! Mime the dwarf. Motives eighty-six, seven, and five. Enter Siegfried! The horn!" Mr. Weston here began to sing. "Motives six and three. 'Cellos and horns, six-eight rhythm. Wotan the wanderer. Note chromatics!" Bang, "Tremolos. Motives eight and eighteen. Siegfried forges sword. Sword and fire motive. Da de da de dah! Forge motive. Ding dang ding dang!" Mr. Weston was singing again. "The sword is finished!" Crash! "He cleaves the anvil!" Prestissimo, Fortissimo, Crash, Bang, Bang!

Mr. Weston stopped.

"You see," he explained, "I am only giving you a sketchy outline of my method. I intend to familiarize my pupils with all the Wagnerian motives, each of which will have a number, so that when I call it out, no matter what it is, they will be on the lookout for it and be able to identify it the moment it appears. When they become familiar with them and understand their significance, no matter how deep they may be, the


music will interpret itself as it goes along. How do you like it?"

"Is n't it wonderful!" Kate looked at Claire, her eyes suffused with emotion. "Mr. Weston has taught me more about Wagner in the few times I have talked with him than I had learned in my whole life before!"

But Claire did n't like it at all. There was nothing in the least new about what he had been doing, and what he did was not well done. He was, Claire thought, extremely noisy and extremely amateurish. How strange it was that Aunt Kate could n't see it too. Her cogitations were interrupted by another loud chord from the piano.

"Act two," began Mr. Weston. "Mysterious Vorspiel, gathering in increasing crescendos!" Crash! Crash! Crash! "Curtain rises. A cave in forest. Motives nine and twelve. Siegfried enters. First bar of love motive. Tremulous vibrations of the strings. He lies down. Violins take up the theme. De da de da de dah. Bird flutters above. Thirds and sixths. Song of bird —"

At this moment a thin, quavering howl issued from beneath the sofa. The smallish dog had begun to be affected by the music. Mr. Weston paid no attention at first, and encouraged probably by this fact the dog proceeded to execute a creditable series of vocal gymnastics increasing in range and energy so rapidly that Mr. Weston at last stopped abruptly, to Claire's relief, with irritation written plainly on his features, and dis-



lodged the dog, which ran out of the room. Claire thought the incident rather ludicrous, but it seemed to produce in Kate and Mr. Weston no emotion other than that of annoyance. "Clearly," she thought, "neither of them has the least sense of humor."

Weston now resumed his expository harangue, increasing its noise and energy until the culmination was reached in the love scene between Siegfried and Brunnhilde, which Claire thought he delivered too pointedly at Kate. Claire watched her painfully. As Weston's dramatic delivery increased toward the finale, her somber eyes seemed to blaze with emotion. "She is in love with him! How strange!" thought Claire. It seemed impossible that a Nicholson could become enamoured of such a type as that which the fat charlatan who sat on the piano-stool before her represented, and yet Claire was sure of it. "Yes, she is in love with him!" she repeated. What could her aunt see in him? He had no social attributes whatever; none of the jovial charm which might be reasonably expected of such an adventurer, and no attractions either of manner or person, and yet Aunt Kate was, without doubt, infatuated.

When the time came for them to go, Claire did so with relief. Kate insisted on going west to Sixth Avenue, north to Tenth Street, through Tenth Street to the Avenue, and so home, but this precaution availed them nothing, for when they let themselves in, Caroline was standing in the drawing-room doorway, large and erect, with an angry flash in her sharp eyes.

"Well!" she demanded ominously, "did you have a pleasant call?"

Kate went gray.

"I saw you!" Caroline went on. "I saw you before you saw me, on Sixth Avenue. I knew you were up to something, so I watched you from the vegetable man's. Claire! Go upstairs!"

Claire went slowly upstairs, while at a gesture Kate followed Caroline into the drawing-room. Caroline shut the door, but Claire could hear her loud, angry voice lashing Kate, whose responses were at first too low to be distinguished, but presently, under Caroline's taunts, they grew louder, and even to Claire's room there ascended the clash of furious retorts and accusations. After a time the drawing-room door opened and some one ascended the stairs. It was Kate. As she came up, with one hand holding a handkerchief to her eyes, she was sobbing restrainedly, with an effort at concealment, in tones the quality of which indicated half wretchedness and half anger. When she wished it to, Caroline's tongue could scarify. As Kate went into her room, her door slammed viciously, and then all was silent; but soon other steps were heard ascending, and presently Caroline, reaching Claire's door, came in, closing it after her, and as she turned so that the light from the windows fell on her, Claire saw again that look of age, those indications of disintegration which she had noticed once before, and in addition an air of fatigue, of worry, of weakness almost foreign to Caroline's

character. But still abrupt, still purposeful, Caroline demanded:

“What were you doing there?”

“Aunt Kate took me to call on Mr. Weston.”

“Had you been there before?”

“No, of course not, Aunt Caroline!”

“Why ‘of course’? You seem to be full of tricks lately!”

“It was n’t a trick! I did n’t know we were going there until after we’d started!”

“Well, Kate did say that for you! What’s he like?”

Claire hesitated, and then, deeming that reservations under the circumstances could serve no good purpose, answered, “Oh, aunt, he’s awful!”

“Is he?” asked Caroline with a startled look.

“Awful! So common! Is Aunt Kate really in love with him?”

“How do I know! The silly fool! She’s almost old enough to be his mother!” And suddenly Caroline sank down on the bed and began wringing her hands in a startling agony of abandonment, crying, “What are we coming to? That’s what I’d like to know! What is the matter with us? What’s wrong with us? All going to the devil!”

“Did Uncle Edward telephone?”

“No. He was lying — I felt it — just as everybody else seems to be!”

“And George?”

"I telephoned him, but he was out. I left word for him to come up as soon as he got my message."

A knock sounded, and in response to Claire's answer, George himself entered, looking preoccupied.

"What were *you* doing last night?" Caroline demanded.

"Doing! Working, of course!"

"Working! All night?"

"Pretty nearly. I was with Orville and stayed all night there. Things have been panicky on the Exchange for a week. A lot of people have got smashed. Where's uncle? I've been trying to get hold of him."

"He went to the factory last night."

"Went to the factory last night?" cried George in amazement. "What on earth did he do that for? Is he crazy?"

"Why should n't he go?" returned Caroline shrewdly. "How does it affect him? He does n't speculate!"

"Of course he speculates!" replied George. "Everybody speculates!"

"With whose money, then?"

"With his own, I suppose!"

"George," said Caroline solemnly, "I have telephoned for Robinson Elder!"

"Why? What's the matter?"

"George, the lawyers for the people who hold the mortgage on my houses — and, mind you, I put the mortgage on at Edward's advice only two years ago — telephoned me yesterday to know why the interest had

not been paid. It is nearly six months overdue. They said that they had written me about it on three separate occasions!"

"Did n't you do anything when you got the letters?" asked George.

"I never got them!"

"Never got them! That's funny!" exclaimed George reflectively.

"Yes, it's *very* funny! Especially as your uncle always sees the morning mail first!"

"Good Lord, Aunt Caroline!" said George, starting. "What do you mean?"

"Why was he so late with the last factory dividend?" Caroline asked. "I asked him, and thought then that he looked very queer. George, we've got to do something or we may all find ourselves facing ruin!"

"Of course we've got to do something — although as far as I'm concerned I'm out of it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I sold my interest in the factory nearly a year ago," replied George, not without a note of satisfaction in his voice. "I wanted the money."

"George Nicholson, did you suspect anything?"

"Now, look here, Aunt Caroline!" cried George indignantly. "That's a little too much, if —"

"I'm sorry, George," Caroline acknowledged hastily, "I did n't mean that. But you must help us!"

"Of course I'll help!" He paced to and fro for a mo-

ment or two. "Did uncle know that you had heard that the interest had n't been paid?"

"Yes, I told him."

"What did he say?"

"He said that Roscoe should have attended to it."

"Roscoe!" cried George. "A likely story!"

"He promised to speak to Roscoe about it this morning and call me up from the factory at eleven, and when he did n't, I telephoned Robinson Elder."

"You did just right, too! When will he be here?"

"He could n't tell exactly. Sometime during the afternoon."

"Everybody's rushed to death," answered George. "The main thing is to get hold of Uncle Edward and have Elder put the screws on him. He won't tell *you* anything."

The gong sounded and they went down to luncheon.

"You don't know where Jamie is, of course," Caroline observed as they were rising from the table.

"No," answered George. "Why?"

"He went out before breakfast and we have n't seen him since."

George disappeared into the telephone closet, immediately after luncheon, joining Caroline and Claire in the drawing-room a moment later. Kate had not left her room since her interview with Caroline earlier in the day.

"I just telephoned the office," George announced. "Jamie has n't been there at all to-day. On the rampage most likely. The damned little jackass!"

"But where does he get it, George?" Caroline asked, "now that prohibition's in force."

"That's easy," George answered.

"We ought to find him!" put in Claire.

"*Find him!* How are you going to *find* him? He may be anywhere between the Battery and Harlem. Don't worry, though. He won't get lost, worse luck," George went on vindictively. "He'll come home all right, and when he does, I'm going to thrash him!"

"You shall not, George!" Claire cried. "We've tried scolding, and you see how much good it does. If that's the only thing we can think of, we'd better do nothing. Threats and upbraidings only make him worse. If anybody must speak to him, let me, and in the meantime let's try being kind to him so that he'll know that we're sorry for him."

George went into the hall, took his hat from the rack, and came back again, saying: "All right! I know what will happen. We jump on Jamie and it does n't do any good; Claire's perfectly right; but Claire will try persuasion and that won't do any good either. The only thing that would help him would be to put him in a sanitarium where he can't get it or send him to a cure. Well, we won't do either, until it's too late. Nobody ever does!"

George turned toward the door and came back once more.

"But the main thing just now is Uncle Edward! Jamie can wait. When Elder gets here, telephone me

and I'll come right up if I possibly can. You've got to do something and not lose any time about it. When is uncle coming back?"

"To-morrow morning, he said."

"Well, we've got to have things ready, and as soon as he gets here, have it out with him!" And George, looking at his watch, darted out of the house.

The front door had just banged to after the departing George, when Annie, the chambermaid, hurried downstairs and stopped at the drawing-room, saying, "He's in his room, Miss Nicholson!"

"Who?" Caroline demanded.

"Mr. Jamie, ma'am. He's lying on his bed."

"On his bed!" cried Caroline. "How long has he been in? Tell him to come down and get his luncheon."

"He's sick, ma'am, I think," Annie answered uneasily.

Caroline rose quickly and, followed by Claire, went upstairs. Jamie was lying on his bed, fully dressed, the counterpane dirtied and blackened by his shoes, either asleep or insensible. Caroline, seizing his coat-sleeve, shook him sturdily without rousing him out of his deep lethargy. "Jamie! Jamie!" she called again and again without result. Claire, too, tried, unsuccessfully, to rouse him. He lay apparently in a condition of coma so profound that it frightened them.

"You'd better telephone the doctor, Claire," Caroline said at last. "Send Annie up and I'll get him into bed."

Claire ran downstairs with a beating heart, and telephoned the family doctor, luckily finding him in. He



lived close at hand, and she waited for him, opening the door when he appeared at the bottom of the steps. As he entered, an oldish man, strong-shouldered and ruddy, with grayish curling beard and mustache, he brought with him an odor of tweed clothing and tobacco, and that invulnerable air which makes one say of some doctors, "Surely, this man is immortal."

"Hello!" he said. "Anybody sick?"

He was puffing a little, and Claire felt one of her hands enveloped in a large, warm pressure as he looked at her with his cheerful, twinkling eyes.

"Yes, it's Jamie," Claire answered. She had not gone into details over the telephone and did not wish to do so now. "Aunt Caroline said that you were please to go right up."

"All right! Let's see — two flights, is n't it?"

The doctor looked hesitatingly at the ascent before him, and then, with sudden resolution, grasped the banisters, and, puffing more heavily than before, began to mount the stairs. Claire went into the drawing-room and waited, and as she stood by the window, looking out into the street, she thought of something Mallette had said to her during one of his calls. They had been talking of Jamie, and he had said, "The main thing is, don't let life bear down on you too heavily. It will if you give it the chance!"

That sadness, that atmosphere of melancholy, of resignation, which comes sometimes with the approach of evening, seemed to fill the street, as if the city, inert,

nerveless, had surrendered itself to the contemplation of the complicated mysteries and miseries of life, and for a moment Claire's vigorous youthfulness sank a little under the spell of its vague depression.

She heard the doctor coming down the stairs, causing them to groan under his weight, and going into the hall she led him into the drawing-room.

"How is he, doctor?"

"He's all right, or will be by to-morrow."

"What are we to do with him?"

"Eh? Tell him to behave himself!"

"As if we had n't done that already!"


"Yes, I suppose so," he answered. He began twirling his mustache and then said suddenly, "Why don't you shut him up?"

"Oh, doctor!"

"Well, there you are! The trouble with cases like Jamie's is that people will insist on treating them as free agents when they're not. How long has he been doing it?"

"We don't know."

"Much longer than you imagine, probably!" And looking at her he seemed to be arrested by something he saw in her. All at once he had realized that this child, whom he had known so long, was a child no longer. That she had already bloomed, under his accustomed eye, into the full, unblemished splendor of perfect youth, and that already she was beginning to feel the inescapable contact of the eroding surfaces of life.



The doctor put his hand to his mustache once more, this time almost in confusion, finally saying, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll try to think of something!" And buttoning his coat he hastily went out.


Claire took a book and went up to her room, Particolor following her. She undid her dress, put on a thin negligee, and sat down. It was very warm, but the room was pleasantly darkened by the tilted slats of the jalousies. She glanced down. Particolor was looking at her with his limpid eyes, asking, with soft, suppliant undulations of his silky draperies, to be taken up. She lifted him into her lap and began to read, attempting to throw off, for the moment, the pressing problems which harassed her. She sat restless but resolute, until the lengthening shadows without warned her that the afternoon was nearing its end, and getting up she began to dress. She had forgotten that it was Friday and her afternoon at home, and, intending to go for a walk before dinner, was standing in front of her mirror about to adjust her hat, when Maggie knocked at the door announcing that Mr. Mallette was in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI

MAGGIE, with the bib of her white apron pinned tightly over her excessive bosom, and with a white cap, worn only on Claire's afternoons at home, fastened too far forward on her rather untidy reddish hair, had set the tea-tray down on the small table with a bump, and Claire was pouring tea for Mallette while he watched her fine, well-shaped hands and her white wrists.

The house was quiet. The room was filled with the soft, waning light of late afternoon. Claire was glad that Mallette had come, and while she had no intention of making a confidant of him — even of Jamie's latest dereliction, although she had previously talked with him of others — she felt grateful to him for his timely arrival which might help her for the moment to forget the questions which vexed her. Mallette, on his part, was tasting once more the flavor of things he had known so well at home; the tea things, the furniture, solid and old-fashioned, the sensation of sitting in a private house once again — of, in a measure, the kind he had known before — with this young girl. It seemed delicious to him, and drew back, crowding into his mind, old memories which now he did not try to banish, and which brought into his face an expression which caused Claire to say:

“You look as if you were thinking of things which are



far, far away!" And Mallette, unconscious of the irony of his answer, replied:

"Yes, I was thinking of home."

"Home?" repeated Claire with a purpose.

"Yes," answered Mallette. "And England."

"Since you told us about yourself, Jamie and I have talked so much about it," said Claire. "We don't agree, Mr. Mallette. Jamie thinks your way was the only one, but I am not so sure."

She found that she could say this without fear that he might think her intrusive.

"I could see no other," Mallette answered.

"But the whole of life was before you! It was as if you had two roads to choose from, one you knew well which was smooth and perfect, the other obscure and narrow."

"The same parallel occurred to me!" Mallette replied, "and it seemed to me that that smooth and perfect road was built for me by the toil and sweat of all those who have been ground under the pressure of our industrial system." He hesitated, as if reluctant to go on with the subject, and then added: "You see, my father put the choice squarely before me. Suppose, for instance, that my eyes had not been opened until after I had become the head of Mallette's. I would have gone on then carrying out my plans for the welfare of my workers and I should not have hesitated to live myself as I had been used to living, not perhaps as my father had lived, but well enough for any one, but that

chance was not allowed me. He said, 'Take your choice. Go on with Mallette's as we have in the past, or give it up!' There was no alternative! Would n't you have done as I did?"

"Perhaps so — in fact I suppose I — no, I should n't have been strong enough!" Claire finally decided.

"You must n't think I don't think it was splendid of you. Only nobody seems to bother much about such things; I mean about people being poor and unhappy! *I* never have. But if the result of the war is to bring these questions up for solution, as it has so many others, perhaps your father will begin to think about solving them too, and send for you to help him. You would go, of course."

"Yes, I would go," Mallette answered. "These questions are coming up for solution everywhere and in England are receiving earnest attention, but we have certain pretty stubborn types in England and my father is one of them."

"But let me see," said Claire. "If you had stayed, even under your father's conditions, could n't you have done *something*? Is n't it as if you, who might have done *something*, even if ever so little, had left your workers in the hands of people who will never do anything at all?"

Mallette made a gesture half explanatory and half of protest.

"My father thought of all that — that I might try to help them indirectly. The previsions he suggested were written out. He took pains to guard against anything

of that sort — help outside the works I suppose you mean — because he did n't believe in it — thought that the more you gave them the more they'd want, and that philanthropic work of any kind would increase strikes and dissatisfaction generally. But what difference can it make, after all, so far as I am concerned? I will be the same. I am sure no worse. I shall not be able to afford limousines like Mr. Orville or perhaps do some of the things I used to do, but there is only one way by which lack of money may prove a drawback, and that is if it affects human relations detrimentally, and it has always seemed to me that money serves to dislocate them more often than the lack of it. I mean, of course, a moderate lack of it. Not poverty!"

Claire hesitated and then determined to ask him a question she had often asked herself.

"But being an actor? Will you always be one?"

Mallette laughed. "Certainly not. But you have no idea how difficult it is for people brought up as you and I to keep body and soul together if they find themselves all at once thrown on their own resources without help from any one. I hope you will never know what it means. I was at the end of my tether when I was offered a small part in London. That was just before the war. When war came I volunteered at once, but my slight experience on the stage gave me my chance here when I received my discharge. But as for spending my life as an actor!" He made a gesture of distaste. "Well, hardly!" He paused and got up.

"And now I must say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" repeated Claire in astonishment.

"Yes, my company is going on tour. We leave to-morrow."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I'm sorry! When will you be back?"

"Not until winter, I think. We go to the Pacific coast."

Claire did not speak for a moment, and then noticing that her hand still lay in his, she flushed and withdrew it. Mallette too stood silent, seemed about to speak, checked himself, and again held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Miss Nicholson!"

"Good-bye!" Claire answered, giving him her hand once more, and he was gone.

She went to the window and watched him until he had disappeared beyond the range of her vision. She had seen a good deal of him since she had first asked him to call, and had grown to look forward to his visits, but there had always remained in their relationship, for her at least, an element of uncertainty as to her judgment of him.

As he passed out of sight while she stood looking after him, some slight essence seemed to pass from her, but what its nature was she could not tell. He attracted her and yet puzzled her; pleased her and yet aroused in her, at times, feelings almost of distrust, so alien, so baffling was he in his philosophy of life.

"How strange he is!" she thought. "How strange and different!"

George called up about dinner-time, and finding that Elder the lawyer had telephoned that it would be impossible for him to reach Ninth Street until some time during the evening, probably about nine, decided to dine down-town, finish some pressing work, and reach home at that hour too. Jamie was still in bed. Kate had left the house late in the afternoon, leaving word that she would be dining out, and Caroline was lying down, having instructed Annie that she would have some tea and toast in her room and rest there until Mr. Elder's arrival. Not one word had been received from Edward.

Claire, left alone, therefore, became a prey to a restlessness so acute that she welcomed with quick relief the news which Maggie brought her, a little before eight, that Helena wished to speak to her, and ran down quickly to the closet under the stairs.

"Yes, Helena!" she called, and Helena's voice came sweet and thin over the wire:

"Oh, Claire, did you know that there were only two more nights of 'The Rainbow'?"

This was the comedy in which Mallette was playing.

"Yes, he called here this afternoon."

There was a slight pause, and Helena asked, "Have you seen him in it?"

"No," Claire answered, "I have n't."

"Would you like to go to-night?"

This time Claire hesitated. She was not sure whether she wanted to or not, much as she would have liked to go somewhere.


"Because," Helena went on, "I have tickets for two. You need n't be afraid that your illusions will be shattered because he's really quite good!"

Claire decided that she would go, and said so.

"Very well," Helena answered. "Mamma is ill and says I may use the brougham, so I will call for you at eight."

Helena, however, did not arrive until quarter past, because her coachman, instead of going straight down the Avenue, took another route.

The aspect of the Avenue changes with each hour of the day. In the morning the vacant spaces of its long perspective fill slowly. Ladies appear on foot, in motors, and in occasional carriages. Children are seen with nurses and maids. Occasional processions of hobbled-hoys, inmates of young ladies' boarding-schools in charge of a teacher or two, march perfunctorily around corners and disappear. There are decent intervals between the vehicles in the roadway, and between the pedestrians on the pavements, but as the day advances the congestion increases. The volume of vehicular traffic swells steadily. Into this single great, unobstructed artery, from all the cross-streets pour the trucks and wagons of commerce. On the sidewalks the complexion of the crowd changes, a brisk multitude, active and businesslike, swarms, swallowing up the ladies and the children, and in turn being swallowed up at the noon hour by the multitudes of foreign workers who pour out into the street from the colossal buildings close at hand.




At one, these latter swarms melt away, but others are already pouring in to take their places, of still another character; shoppers, idlers, prostitutes, and loafers, and already the motor-trucks and wagons of the morning are being crowded out by vehicles of pleasure and for human transportation; taxi-cabs, private cars of every pattern, and a constantly increasing procession of the green omnibuses of the Avenue. The roadway between the curbs, as the afternoon advances, becomes a mass of moving or stopping motors, while from the east and west processions of people, thousands and still thousands, pour into the channel of the street until, at its daily culmination at six o'clock, one is jammed in a torrent of every imaginable type, condition, and degree; deafening noises clash against one's ear-drums, the air is loaded with dust, the odors of motor exhausts, and the exhalations of people, and jostled in the currents of this limitless mob, one gives way resentfully to reflections on the senseless prolificacy of the human species. But by six-thirty the flood has receded perceptibly, at seven it has diminished by half, at seven-thirty it has vanished, the shops are closed, and but for a sprinkling of individuals moving on here and there to evening engagements, the Avenue is empty.

Helena's coachman, therefore, had a broad and unobstructed route to traverse, and yet, no sooner had Helena slammed the brougham's door, than he turned into Madison Avenue, dodging trolley cars until he reached Forty-Second, where he became entangled in

a web of traffic, swerved over to Park, thence to Fourth, which in many places was being repaired, always with his knees bent at a proper angle and properly apart, with his back hollowed slightly and his smart hat tilted to exactly the right degree over his aquiline and yet vacant features, as if his task was being accomplished with the greatest possible skill, knowledge, foresight, and *éclat*. Finally he turned west and, crossing the Avenue, stopped at the number Helena had given him — but in Tenth Street instead of Ninth. Helena, indolent and yet irritated, sent him on again, and they arrived at the Nicholsons' fifteen minutes late to find Claire on the sidewalk waiting to open the door. As she did so, Helena's voice, sweet but *pétulant*, issued from the interior of the brougham.

"Tell the fool to go up the Avenue, will you, dear — to Forty-Eighth Street — and then west? The theater is the Halcyon. I told him fifteen minutes ago, but he has probably forgotten."

Claire delivered the message. The coachman touched his hat smartly while his vacant features seemed to say, "Don't worry. I am equal to anything!" started to turn toward Sixth Avenue, was corrected by Claire from the window, finally reached Fifth Avenue, and, passing straight uptown between two rows of illuminated globes, over an expanse of dark and shining asphalt, succeeded in turning west, at Forty-Eighth Street. Here, after a short distance, they found themselves in the evening tides of humanity which seemed by a concerted plan to



have deserted the Avenue in order to jostle one another on Broadway.

The brougham stopped and they entered the theater. Stepping within from the glare and noisy activities of that quarter, they found themselves in an interior small, luxurious, and well-padded. A few people here and there were settling themselves on the noiseless upholstery, but the majority of the audience was already seated. Helena's chairs were in the center of the house near the front, and they had hardly arranged themselves in them when, without preliminary notice, the curtain ascended noiselessly, exposing the brightly lighted picture of the first act.

The play, written by a celebrated English playwright, and performed by a company of English players, dealt with the problem of human happiness, and in it the author proved the impossibility of its attainment with such wistful humor, such moving half-poignant gayety, and with such deep draughts of perfumed sentimentality that the audience each night left the theater with the conviction that not only had he proved his contention that there was no such thing as happiness, but that, after all, it was not such a bad thing for humanity that there was not, especially while there was an author living who could offer such supplies of tender sadness in place of it.

Claire's eyes during the evening were often wet, although she was aware that the play contained certain sophistries which would not bear analysis in the morn-

ing, but she was surprised to notice that Helena wept copiously.

Mallette played his part surprisingly well, and what Claire liked best about his performance was his resolute effort to minimize as much as possible the author's tendency toward a rather cloying sentimentality. Many of his lines were loaded with it, but while certain members of the cast did not hesitate to overemphasize them, Mallette, when they fell to him, did his best to counteract them by a studied practicality of delivery. The part which fell to his portrayal, that of a manly, honest, and resolute young man, seemed by his rendition of it to improve on the author's conception of what was manly, honest, and resolute. Claire was glad that she had come.

On emerging from the theater, Helena, who had seen the brougham waiting on the other side of the street, crossed over to it, and as they reached it and were opening the door, the coachman, touching his hat with undiminished smartness, asked briskly:

"Shall I wait here the same as usual, Miss?"

Helena got in hastily without answering, but as Claire seated herself beside her, she exclaimed as if the idea had all at once presented itself to her, "Let's wait and see him come out!"

"Who?" asked Claire, not comprehending.

"Mr. Mallette. The stage entrance is just opposite!"

"Indeed, I shall not!" cried Claire indignantly. "It would be too silly!"

"But he is going away to-morrow, Claire, please!" And as Helena grasped Claire's hand with one of hers Claire felt that it was cold as ice.

"No, I shall not, Helena." And she looked at her closely. She had been forced to play a rôle of this kind earlier in the day with Aunt Kate and did not intend to do so again. "You've waited here before, have n't you?"

Helena produced her handkerchief. "Yes," she answered in a low voice, putting it to her eyes.

"Does he know?" Claire demanded.

"Of course not!" Helena answered in a muffled voice, and then from the movement of her shoulders Claire saw that she was crying silently, but convulsively.

"I'm going home!" cried Claire angrily, and putting her head out of the window she called, "Ninth Street, please!" to the coachman. The coachman touched his hat smartly, with an air which seemed to say, "Don't worry, I'm very competent," turned the horse, which was facing the Avenue, around the other way, started off, and immediately became entangled in the traffic of Broadway. The incapacity of Helena's coachman has a bearing on later events. Helena, with a little shriek of nervous laughter, cried, "He's going the wrong way again!" — and proceeded immediately to give way to a mild attack of hysterics, laughing and crying together. Claire seized her by the shoulders and began to shake her so vigorously that Helena cried presently, "Oh, Claire, please, you're hurting me!"

"Then stop it!" answered Claire grimly. "Will you stop?"

"Please, please, Claire!"

"Will you stop!"

Helena's laughter was getting the better of her tears, and presently with a final shake Claire released her, sank back into her own corner, and neither spoke until Helena said, in what had become now her natural voice:

"Are you angry with me?"

"Suppose he had seen you waiting there for him!"

"He could n't have, Claire — he could n't — I was very careful."

"What did you do it for? Are you in love with him?"

Claire asked almost brutally, and at this question Helena shrank into her corner and raised her handkerchief once more to her eyes.

"Helena, will you stop!" Claire cried, more incensed then ever. "You're just playing with your emotions the way you and a lot of other girls like you love to do and *are* doing all the time!"

"I — I can't help it!" sobbed Helena.


"Then don't ask me to go out with you again!" returned Claire, and she sank back in silence into her corner of the brougham which, rocking over the car tracks, the inequalities of the wretched pavements, and the temporary boardings which covered the subway excavations, moved precariously southward, through a pandemonium of metropolitan noises.

The coachman turned into Sixth Avenue at the intersection of that street with Broadway, and gradually leaving behind the boisterous night life of the city, the brougham, lurching now and then on the tracks of the trolley cars, passed on under the iron structure of the Elevated road, the well-trained, high-stepping hackney, pounding on unmindful of the roar of the trains which passed at intervals above them. Claire and Helena sat in silence, Claire, at least, occupied with her thoughts, until the swaying of the brougham as it left the tracks told her that they were turning into Ninth Street.


While they were yet some distance from the Nicholson house, Claire, glancing idly ahead, saw the heavy bulk of Edward Nicholson pass under the radiance of a street-lamp and melt into the surrounding gloom. She leaned forward and looked again, and as they approached the house she dimly saw him disappear into the cavernous opening of the basement doorway, and heard the faint clangor of the iron door.

The brougham stopped, and, exchanging good-nights with Helena, civil on both sides, but not excessively so, she got out and the brougham moved off. She turned at once to mount the steps leading to the front door, and as she did so, the down-drawn buff shades of the windows of Edward Nicholson's basement sanctum became luminous by the sudden kindling of a light within.

Claire let herself in at the front door. Gas-jets, turned low, burned in the hall and in the drawing-room. She went up to her room, but before going into it she softly



opened Jamie's door. The light from the hall illuminated his room sufficiently for her to see that he was still in bed, and, stooping over, it seemed to her that he was sleeping deeply and naturally. She went into her own room, closed her door and turned up the gas. Particolor, who was lying curled up on the sofa, greeted her with a welcoming wave of his plumed tail, but did no more, and standing before her glass, she began to remove her wrap, thinking of Helena's hysteria with a strange feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest. Presently she turned the gas down again, and going to one of the open windows, stood looking out. The tenements, except for an occasional distant window, were dark, but from below voices rose up to her, and leaning out, she could tell, from the beams of light streaming out on to the flagging and the grass-plot of the yard, that the dining-room was brightly illuminated. At the same time the sound of voices rose again, and among them she could hear distinctly those of Caroline and George. She hesitated for a moment, and then, opening her door, descended to the first floor. The lights in the hall and in the drawing-room burned at half strength, as they had before. Beyond, a gas-jet in the library chandelier was also lighted. And yet, although the rooms were sufficiently illuminated to reveal each familiar interior plainly, and although she could now hear, through the closed doors leading to the dining-room, the muffled sound of voices, a nameless dread suddenly clutched her, the chill of an unformulated and yet terrifying apprehension, and with



a sudden inexplicable accession of panic she almost ran through the drawing-room and library and pushed open one of the sliding doors leading into the dining-room. Four people were seated at the dining-room table. Caroline, George, a man with a shock of untidy gray hair, dark eyes, and a white mustache, whom she knew to be Robinson Elder, and a small, thin-faced, middle-aged creature named Blake, with a bald head and a prominent nose. She knew him, too; he was a kind of head clerk and assistant manager at the New York office of the button works, an employee of twenty years' standing. On hearing of Edward's continued absence, George had got hold of him and brought him along hoping to get some information from him regarding Edward's affairs. An ink-well and a piece of blotting-paper stood and lay before Robinson Elder, who held a pen. He had been writing, and a number of sheets of paper scrawled with memoranda littered the table. At the sound made by the opening door all looked up quickly with expressions indicating that each was sustaining a common sensation of suspense, but on seeing Claire these expressions changed, each showing in a particular way that each had expected to behold some one else. The two men bowed. Claire said "Good-evening," generally, closed the door and advanced toward the table, and at the same moment Robinson Elder, who had risen, looked at his watch.

"Half-past eleven," he said. "I don't think anything further can be done to-night."

"But how long must we wait for my brother?" Caroline asked.

"I should not wait at all. You should take action at once."

"Have you been waiting for Uncle Edward?" Claire asked suddenly.

"We have been doing everything we could possibly think of to find him," answered Caroline. "George telephoned to the factory and they said that he had n't been there at all."

"But he's downstairs — now — at this moment," said Claire. "I saw him go in the basement way not more than ten or fifteen minutes ago, as Helena and I were driving up, and a moment later I saw that he had lit the gas!"

Why there should have been something of sinister portent about this statement no one could have told, but so it was: George cried, "What!" with a startled look, Caroline caught her breath quickly, Robinson Elder squared his shoulders as if poising himself to meet the shock of an antagonist, and the little clerk, plainly frightened, exclaimed in a trembling voice:

"Mr. Nicholson will never forgive me for what I've told you to-night, sir! It will mean the loss of my position!"

"Both legally and morally you were bound to do what you have done," answered Elder. "And as for your position, after to-morrow I doubt whether Mr. Nicholson will have anything to say about it!"

All sat for a moment in attitudes of silent suspense,



when George said, fingering a pencil nervously, "Well, I suppose we may as well have it out with him!"

"Shall I go down," said Elder almost solemnly, "and ask him to come up?"

Caroline jumped up.

"No, no! I will go!" And she drew her breath deeply once more. "Let me speak to him first." And pushing one of the sliding doors back into its pocket, she went out. The remaining four waited rigid and listening. They heard her steps descend the stairs, heard the turn of a knob, and the slight creak of a rusty hinge as a door swung open, and then there rose, in the silence of the night, a cry which froze the listeners with horror. A cry which seemed by sheer force of terror to rend its way through organs already paralyzed by the sight of some blasting spectacle. There was an instant's silence, and then something fell below, causing a slight tremor to shake the floor. George and Elder, after a moment of impotent consternation, sprang up and made hurriedly for the basement stairs. Claire rose and followed. As they went down, George turned and called to her in a hushed but imperative voice, "Where's Blake? Tell him to come!"

Claire darted back, delivered this message to Blake, who was still sitting at the table, a picture of nervous indecision, and, returning, ran down the basement stairs. As the interior of Edward's sanctum came within her view she saw first that the steady radiance of Edward's green-shaded argand lamp illuminated distinctly,

standing on Edward's desk, a glass half-full of water, and a small, round pill-box the size of a half-dollar, and instantly that small box grew big with prognostications of evil. It explained to her what she was to see, and did see. It told her that that huddled bulk, lying distortedly in the shadow of the desk, was the body of Edward Nicholson, dead by his own hand, and as it told her, so had it told her aunt, who, unconscious, as if struck by some terrific blow, breathing with what seemed like appalling difficulty, was being lifted from the floor by George and by Robinson Elder.

CHAPTER XII

HAD Helena's coachman taken the obvious and easy route to Ninth Street after the theater — that is, down the Avenue — Claire would have reached the house some minutes before Edward Nicholson, and it is probable that the discovery of his body would have fallen to the lot of one of the maids on the following morning. It is not likely that any of them would have been seriously affected by it, and the list of Edward Nicholson's offenses might have been considerably lightened, but it was not to be. Fate had written that Caroline was to find him and the cerebral hemorrhage resulting from the shock killed her before morning.

The week that followed seemed afterwards, as Claire looked back on it, a phantasmagoria of horrors — superimposed upon the natural grief which the death of her aunt and in a lesser degree of her uncle gave rise to — made up of the presence of those obnoxious creatures who live on the necessities of death and burial, of the sound of the shuffling of feet slowly carrying heavy, inert burdens, of an awful hush throughout the house, of the presence of flowers whose perfumes had suddenly become insupportable to her; of hearses, funereal carriages, funeral ceremonies, open graves, tears, the black habiliments of mourning, and the whole, to her, hideous

and shocking pageantry and paraphernalia of death, with added to it the scandal of Edward's dishonesty and suicide.

Neither Claire nor George during that first night went to bed at all. Jamie slept through it, and woke to find that during his drunken sleep both Edward and Caroline had vanished into the unknown. Kate, who had left word the afternoon before that she was dining out, had not returned, and this fact, which under ordinary circumstances would have caused intense alarm, had been unheeded among the tragic circumstances of the night; but a telegram was handed in addressed to Caroline an hour after Caroline's death. George opened it. It was from Kate, dated at Boston, saying that she and Mr. Weston had been married there the evening before. George immediately reached her by telephone, and the new bridegroom was introduced to George and Jamie late that afternoon.

At this meeting Weston played an unimportant part. The stage was held by Kate. The secret smouldering fires of her nature kindled into a blaze of resentment and wrath against the delinquencies of the departed Edward; but while Weston was eclipsed by Kate's anger, Claire felt that resentment and indignation were seething in him, too, which would at the first opportunity reveal themselves. And if a rude awakening had come to him twelve hours after his wedding — if he had married a woman much older than himself in the belief that he was, by doing so, firmly allying himself with a family

of substance and position, only to find himself horribly mistaken — one need not wonder.

For in the track of death, ruin followed.

Edward had killed himself, by means of a capsule containing cyanide of potassium, simply because he was at the end of his rope. Robinson Elder began an investigation into the affairs of the Nicholson family the morning after Edward's death, and on the morning after the funeral a meeting was held in the dining-room at Ninth Street at which Mr. and Mrs. Weston, Claire, George, Jamie, and Robinson Elder were present. Elder had made the appointment just as Claire, George, and Jamie were finishing breakfast, and had asked that the Westons be notified — that he would be stopping at Ninth Street in a quarter of an hour on his way downtown. The Westons were at Mr. Weston's rented house across the way. Claire called her aunt up, gave her the message, and joined George and Jamie who were lounging listlessly about in the drawing-room.

"Has he got to be here, too!" Jamie asked gloomily, referring to Weston.

"Of course he has, Jamie," Claire answered. "He's Aunt Kate's husband!"

"Well, for God's sake, tell him to brush the dandruff off his coat collar," said George, addressing Jamie irritably.

"Tell him yourself!" Jamie retorted. Jamie was beginning to recover from a condition of acute contrition arising from the fact that during all that night of stress and tragedy he had been sunk in a drunken sleep.

"Mr. and Mrs. *Will* Weston!" continued George scornfully. It had transpired that on both Mr. Weston's card and Mrs. Weston's card the name "*Will*" preceded that of Weston. "Mr. and Mrs. *Will* Weston. Of course he was n't christened '*Will*.' He was christened '*William*,' but he calls himself '*Will*' for the same reason he does n't keep his hair cut properly. Cheap fakir!"

To Claire's relief Mr. and Mrs. Will Weston and Robinson Elder arrived at identically the same moment. She had had the dining-room table cleared, and led the way to it at once, as being the most private room on the first floor.

George carefully closed the doors and they seated themselves in silence, while through the opened windows of the rear the occasional sounds from the tenements floated in to them. Claire, wearied and depressed, shivered even in the warmth of the summer morning. Opposite her sat Kate, still angry and sullen; at Kate's left, Robinson Elder; at Kate's right, Jamie, quiet and bewildered, as if certain that the whole affair would be quite incomprehensible to him. At Claire's left, George, alert and capable, and at her right, Weston, obviously nursing his resentment.

It is probable that Robinson Elder, through a wider experience, greater age, and the training of a lifetime had acquired a more intense veneration for property than even that developed by the acquisitive instincts of Kate and George; therefore he undertook the task be-

fore him of announcing the catastrophe with sincere reluctance; ruffling his shock of gray hair more hopelessly than ever he began, and as he talked he talked to Claire. It could not be otherwise: Claire, drooping but beautiful, like a tired rose amidst the duller physiognomies around her.

"I am sorry to say," said Elder with an air of real, apologetic regret, "that your uncle has left the affairs of your family in very bad shape!"

"There's no use beating about the bush, Mr. Elder," Kate interrupted explosively. "Does that mean that he has ruined us completely?"

"It looks," Elder went on, still addressing Claire, "as if there would be little or nothing left. Your uncle had the unquestioned control of the property of all the members of your family. There is nothing unusual in this because you will find numbers of families in New York in which one member takes entire financial charge. In your uncle's case I am sorry to say he proved unworthy — " Elder hesitated and took the plunge. "In fact, I have never seen a case of more ruthless wreckage. Your mother left a small fortune in first-class negotiable securities — they have disappeared; your father left stocks and bonds in addition to his interest in the works — they have disappeared. Miss Caroline invested portions of her income from time to time. These investments have disappeared. Your uncle converted everything he could lay his hands on into cash, which he paid into his private account, but what he paid it out for —

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except a small percentage of it — we cannot tell, because, although he continually drew large sums from his bank, it was in most cases done by means of checks drawn to himself. Who got these thousands — these hundreds of thousands, we do not know. It may have been speculation, but he left nothing — not even an accumulation of worthless securities — to show for it. If he speculated he probably did so through some one else. Latterly he resorted to forgery. As for the works, he cleaned them out completely. How he managed to keep going as long as he did without arousing suspicion is a wonder. I repeat, I have never in my entire experience met with a case of such reckless criminality — especially in the class to which your uncle belonged!”

Claire listened to this recital with a sense of shame and of dishonor, and yet without conceiving what it actually might mean to her. Her apprehensions previous to the final catastrophe, aroused by a conviction that all was not going well, dealt with the possible disruption of family ties, but she did not realize that Elder’s words might mean the actual loss of every material resource. Such a possibility — that she might not always be sheltered, clothed, and fed, without a thought and without an effort — was beyond her present grasp.

“I understand there is a woman in the case.” This was from Weston, who seemed to think his opportunity had come, but George immediately returned sharply — he had been waiting a chance to show his disapproval of Kate’s husband —

"You do! Well, my sister is present, and I'd be obliged to you if you'd keep your mouth shut!"

At this rudeness Weston cast an appealing glance at Kate, while Elder looked at Claire interrogatively. Claire, who really scorned that kind of brotherly solicitude as being out of date, answered by saying:

"Is that true, Mr. Elder?"

"It is," replied Elder, "and I have already interviewed the lady. You will not find the solution of your uncle's ruin there!"

"Get her under oath and — " began Weston.

"She's perfectly willing to swear to anything she says," answered Elder.

"She *says* so — " began Will Weston again.

"I can only tell you what she told me," returned Elder.

"I would strongly advise a suit against her," insisted Will.

"And a public scandal!" remarked George. "You won't get any of the Nicholsons to agree to that!"

"I consider that I've got something to say about it," Will retorted. "I thought when I married that the Nicholson family amounted to something — but they turn out to be a lot of bankrupts."

"Much obliged for your frankness," George laughed disagreeably, "only it was n't necessary. We knew exactly what you thought, and it serves you right for marrying a woman twenty years older than you are!"

"George!" cried Claire.

And Kate exclaimed angrily. "This is outrageous!" — and half rose from her chair as if about to leave the room.

"All right," said George. "He's been asking for it, and he got it!"

After this explosion a moment of silence ensued, broken presently by Claire.

"And this house, Mr. Elder, did my uncle sell that too!" she asked and this question conveyed the fact that to Claire the house stood as a symbol of the Nicholson fortunes — that if it had gone all was lost.

"My dear young lady, he did not dispose of it — probably because he could n't. It was part of the trust established by your grandfather, but if it becomes necessary to sell it in order to pay the debts of the estate, then it must be sold."

"And you can't find out who he paid out all our money to, Mr. Elder?" asked Claire.

"For the great bulk of it we cannot. He was interested in Thwaite & Co., who failed the other day. That was probably the last straw. The rest is mystery. The largest amount that we have found any trace of to any one individual is the sum of one hundred thousand dollars paid to your brother George nine months ago."

The effect of this announcement was electrical. Kate stiffened rigidly and bent an accusative glance at George. Will Weston looked about him triumphantly as if to say, "Now we're getting on the track of something!" rubbing his hands gleefully. Claire, who had

forgotten that George had announced this fact both to herself and Caroline, regarded him wonderingly, and even Jamie, who had preserved a deferential silence throughout, seemed to think that here was something needing explanation.

As for George, he thrust his hands in his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and with unruffled calm said nothing.

Although no word had been spoken, Robinson Elder, by the dramatic possibilities of his revelation, had actually interrupted himself; now he went on:

"Your uncle was the sole executor of the property left you and your brothers by your mother and of your interest in the works left by your father, but the principal of all this property should have been turned over to you when your older brother reached the age of twenty-four. Were you acquainted with the provisions of your father's and mother's wills, Miss Nicholson?"

"No, Mr. Elder," Claire answered. "I never thought of them."

"And you?" and Robinson Elder turned to Jamie. This question seemed quite unnecessary because everybody knew instinctively that Jamie, too, would answer in the negative — which he did.

"But you," Robinson Elder went on, addressing himself to George, — "you knew the provisions of these wills. How?"

"I looked them up," George answered promptly.

"How did you induce your uncle to give you your share?"

"I did n't induce him. I told him I knew of the wills and he offered to."

"Did he say anything about giving your sister and your younger brother their shares?"

"No. Neither did I, because I thought it better to leave their shares for uncle to look after. Neither of them knew anything about business. I wanted mine because I knew I could double it and treble it in the Street. He did n't say a word to me about Claire's or Jamie's share!"

"He did to me," Kate interrupted, "and to my sister. He called our attention to the fact that the settlement was due, but said it would be more advantageous to wait a year or so. He asked our advice. We told him to consult the children's interests."

"Did he say that he had given or intended to give George his share?"

"He did not."

Robinson Elder turned again to George. "According to your uncle's books, he gave you the hundred thousand dollars in two payments, one of sixty thousand and one of forty thousand. Is that correct?"

"It is," George answered.

"The first payment he seems to have raised by endorsing over to himself various checks, made payable to the Nicholson Company, and by forging the name of one of the Nicholson Company's largest customers to a note for the balance. That is, I assume this from the coincidence of dates. The second payment of forty

thousand dollars he secured through a mortgage. Did your sister ever mention that she had placed a second mortgage on her houses across the street, Mrs. Weston?"

"She certainly did not, Mr. Elder. Some one told me some months ago that they had noticed the record of a second mortgage on her houses, and when I spoke to her about it she said it was n't so. I was sure they had been mistaken and said no more about it."

"Nevertheless, there is a second mortgage."

"Then he got her signature by some chicanery — if she really signed it at all."

"The mortgage is genuine, but the forty thousand dollars was paid by check by the mortgagors to the order of Miss Caroline Nicholson. Your brother endorsed the check over to himself by means of forgery, and deposited it in his bank. This was on the 27th of last November — on the 28th he made his second and last payment (amounting to forty thousand dollars) to George here."

"So that my nephew was paid his inheritance out of moneys belonging to the Nicholson Company and my sister — is that it?" Kate demanded.

"George's inheritance was due, and when his uncle offered it to him he took it."

"And to pay George he robbed the rest of us," Kate retorted. "Well, George can easily return it to us."

"And have it gobbled up by the creditors!" George cried. "No, thank you."

"It has n't anything to do with the creditors!" re-

torted Kate angrily. "Legally the money may be yours, but morally it belongs to all of us."

"If it does n't belong to me morally, it does n't belong to you morally," answered George.

"Very well; if you intend to rob us, say so."

"Look here, Aunt Kate, you want me to turn my inheritance over to be divided among the Nicholson heirs — that is, yourself, myself, Claire, and Jamie. If I do that, will you turn *your* property in, too? You've been investing dividends Uncle Edward paid you for years in outside securities. How do you know he was n't selling my mother's securities to do it?"

"That's a quibble!" answered Kate.

"I thought you'd think so," George retorted.

Here Claire spoke again.

"But it seems to me that if the Nicholson family owes money through Uncle Edward's acts, we must all give what we have to pay it, must n't we, Mr. Elder? Are n't we in a way responsible for him?"

"Responsible for his dishonesty!" Kate cried before Elder had an opportunity to answer. "Did n't he rob us as well as others? They'll never get a cent from me!"

"Do you agree with your wife there?" asked George of Weston.

"I do, most certainly."

"I thought you would," remarked George ironically.

Kate turned sullenly to Elder. "Is there anything more?"

"Nothing; except the thing that I really came for —

and that is to suggest that an application for a receiver for the Nicholson Company be made immediately — there is really nothing else to be done. If you say so, I will have the papers made out.”

Kate got up, Weston following her example. “Very well,” she answered. “You know best. But, George Nicholson, I’m really surprised and shocked at what I’ve just heard. I consider that you’ve taken a hundred thousand dollars that does n’t belong to you, and — well, you’ll hear from me about it later!”

“All right,” returned George as Kate, with Weston, disappeared into the library. “Sue, if you want to — it won’t do any good.”

Elder had risen and, shaking hands with Claire, was following the Westons toward the front door.

“Going downtown, Mr. Elder?” George called. “All right, I’ll go with you.” And he was about to follow him when Claire called him back.

In this tangled skein of death, dishonor, insolvency, and selfish interests, she sought vaguely for some thread which might unravel it, and grasping a sleeve of George’s coat she said in a low tone, trying to find words for matters she so little understood:

“Does it mean, George, that our failure and uncle’s wrongful use of money that was n’t his, will cause others to fail, too?”

“It will cause them to lose money — I don’t know whether they’ll fail or not. We can’t help that. Why?”

"But we must make good, if we can, George. We must!"


"That's nonsense. You don't understand. People have to look out for themselves. Anyway, I can't go into it now. Elder's waiting for me."

George and Robinson Elder had gone away together, following the departure of the Westons. Maggie entered the dining-room to discuss some matter of domestic necessity. Claire had taken up the reins of government almost without a thought amid the preoccupation of more important things, but now a sudden distaste assailed her, and answering her as briefly as she could, she rose from the table. As she passed into the hall she saw that Jamie was seating himself at the piano, and she thought, "If Jamie begins to play his waltz now, I shall go mad." She ran upstairs past the rooms of Caroline and Edward, where it seemed to her that potent but invisible entities still dwelt, into her own, slamming the door after her. A future of blank emptiness seemed to spread itself before her. Her old life was at an end — and beaten down, discouraged by Elder's revelations and by the sordid quarrels of George and Kate, she thought that she did not much care — she would not mind if it were swept away competely; but when she tried to imagine what might take its place, she could not do so.

She went to one of her windows and looked out. Out of all the buildings that hemmed her in and from the

streets beyond, the odors and sounds of the city rose into the palpitating haze of an August day. She glanced across at the opposite tenement and was arrested by the blank look of the windows of one of the small flats. The rooms, where late one night she had seen the tired woman walking with her child, were bare and empty — the sash was raised and she could look past the torn and dirty shades into its interior. The flat consisted of two rooms, a very small one containing a diminutive gas cooking-stove and a larger one in which the family had lived — both were empty. Torn scraps of paper lay on the floor, a few rags, a broken dish, a twisted shoe. Its occupants, leaving their litter behind them, had moved away taking their pitiful possessions with them. But where, what possible object could such wretches have in moving? For something told her that the condition of the poor does not change, that life with them is always at a dead level of dirt, crowded quarters, and destitution, and that if they had gone it was because they were forced to do so, and she pictured to herself the somber pilgrimage of this family — typical of thousands — dragging their tattered property, a bed or two, a dirty mattress, broken chairs, a grimy and revolting array of decaying domestic utensils, a few tattered rags of clothing, a battered trunk, things that were worthless except that they had not the means to replace them, from tenement to tenement, in an endless hegira without purpose and without hope.

And as she looked into those empty rooms she thought of her own, and imagined it, too, empty and desolate. It would not look so very different with the carpet up, with the pictures gone, leaving slight stains on the plain surface of the painted walls, and with the absence of curtains revealing the evidences of slight disintegration progressing in the mouldings of the doors and windows. Denuded of everything, the bed, the rugs, the chairs, every evidence of occupancy, it, too, would present a picture not unlike that of the sordid tenement across the way. And soon it would be like that, and the whole house. In the drawing-room, the red damask curtains, the painting by Neolini, the cabinet with its familiar objects, the bronze maiden holding two cherries between her lips, the piano, the engraved glass globes which shaded the gas-jets, the fender, and the tea-table on which Maggie had for years bumped down the heavy tea-tray of Georgian silver. In the dining-room the carved, staring yellow oak furniture upholstered with dark green leather, the dinner service, the goblets, the Turkish rug. In every room a multiplicity of objects, which had communed with her in silent friendship since she was a child, would pass away — and with them would pass the very essence of home, would pass those individual and delicious smells peculiar to this house in all the world — of the house itself as you entered it; of Jamie's rooms lightly pungent with the smoke of vanished cigarettes; of the familiar perfumes of her own — the scent of the down pillows of her sofa, the aroma rising from the



drawers of her bureau as she opened them. Would pass the intimate and familiar daily sensations, the feel of the polished handrail of the stairway whose every curve and conformation her hand knew so well, the softness of the stair carpets, of her rocking-chair by the window where with Particolor she was wont to sit so often, the delicious softness of her bed, the sofa by the window in the drawing-room. Would pass the sounds, the distant roll of the dumb-waiter, the closing of the front door, the click of her shoes on the black-and-white marble of the hall, the faint roar of running water, voices here and there rising from above and below, and strained of all except a plaintive and minor quality the notes of the piano rising under Jamie's touch from the drawing-room stealing through the panels of her closed door. Would pass that delicious, intimate, and solitary life she led at intervals behind that door shut away with her secret thoughts, with her rosy dreams of what life might hold for her, and which another room would never know. Would pass the intimate machinery of existence, would pass the servants, would pass herself, Jamie, George, the lingering shades of the departed, would pass all the concrete expressions, the accumulated, the stored-up evidences of that sentient record called life.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME one knocked at the door. Claire had seated herself at the window under the weight of a sudden exhaustion which had weakened her limbs. She knew it was Jamie, and while she did not want to see him — did not at that moment, drooping under the lassitude of the torrid afternoon, want to see any one — she did not move or speak. The door opened and Jamie came in, subdued and listless, his hands in his pockets, and without removing them sat down on the edge of a chair, looking vaguely about as if for something, some subject wherewith to break the spell of the oppressive quiet of the house and of the sultry summer afternoon. Finally he said:

“Perhaps before long now I shall be able to go.”

“What do you mean?” asked Claire faintly.

“To Paris! Now that — that —”

“But we have n’t any money, Jamie!”

“Have n’t *any* money!” Jamie replied, incredulously.

“We shan’t have any. Everything will have to go to pay our debts!”

“But we’ll have *something*,” Jamie insisted.

“Nothing — Mr. Elder said so. You heard him.”

Jamie seemed struck dumb; but presently he said, “George has a hundred thousand dollars, and Aunt Kate has some.”

“But it is n’t ours, Jamie.”

"I always thought there was something queer about him," Jamie said reflectively — "always. Did n't you?"

"Not until you told me about that woman, and after that when I thought Aunt Caroline was worried about something."

"Well, here we are left in the lurch by our forebears. I told you the liabilities were n't all on our side. What are we going to do?"

"I'm going to ask *you* that," Claire answered. She felt simultaneously irritated and exhausted. "I can think for myself, but I can't for you. What are *you* going to do? You've always had a place to come to where people would shield you, but you won't any longer, because I'm the only one now, and I can't, I'm tired."

Jamie sat quite still looking straight in front of him, miserably.

"You see! You don't answer!"

"I don't answer," replied Jamie, "because I've broken my promise to you so often. Don't bother about me, Claire. I'm not worth it, I'm afraid."

Would pass, herself, George, Jamie, the lingering shades of the departed, the accumulated expressions of her life, and of them all she and Jamie would cling together — it must be so — she would not wish it otherwise, and yet the weight of his weakness seemed pressing down on her with unbearable inertia.

"It's too hard," she heard herself say, "you make it too —" And she slipped away into unconsciousness.

The torrid light of afternoon had changed to a purple dusk. One of the gas-jets, the one with the green shade, was lighted, but turned low. A smell of tweeds and tobacco, faint but pleasant, welcomed her back. A large hand was holding her wrist, and she saw the doctor with his crisp, curly gray beard and mustache looking at her with his kind and quizzical expression, reassuring and tonic.

"Waking up, are you?" he said, finally, after what seemed like a long time.

"Have I been ill?" Claire asked.

"Not exactly. Heat and fatigue. That's all. Too much town air. You and Jamie are going away."

"We can't, doctor," Claire answered tremulously, and her lips began to quiver.

"Why not?"

"Because — because we have n't any money." And she was on the verge of a torrent of tears when the doctor's tremendous and hearty laugh boomed through the room and through the house, attacking her like the assault of an invigorating douche.

"No money, eh? What do you mean?"

"Mr. Elder said so."

"He did, did he? Hang lawyers! They always make things out ten times worse than they really are to get credit for putting them right again. Don't you worry.

Crying because you thought you had n't any money, eh?"

And the doctor's explosive laugh boomed again through the house, making the air tremble, and these vibrations seemed to drive before them the accumulating shadows of the immediate past; seemed to charge the lifeless air which hung heavily throughout the house with something encouraging and vital; seemed potent even to banish the shades of the departed lingering in the rooms below. And to Claire, tired even as she was, with nerves stretched far beyond normal, there was in the tones of those strong, hearty, boisterous, human explosions something indescribably welcome and sustaining. The strong buoyancy of youth rose to their summons, and although she was too nerveless to dry the tears which had damped her cheeks, with a smile she turned upon her side and slept.

When she awoke it was night. Through the open windows the silhouettes of the tenements, as flat as if cut from black paper, sprinkled with occasional lights, displayed their outlines against a faint dusty glow rising from the street beyond. The accustomed noises of the evening came to her, the gongs of the electric cars, the rumbling of the distant Elevated, rattle of wheels, cries of urchins, and the thin notes of the reedy instrument she had heard before. Across the corner of her bed lay a sheet of light projected by the gas-jet in the hall, which threw the illuminated oblong of the doorway against the opposite wall. Jamie was moving about in his room

whistling, softly and half apologetically, something of his own.

"Jamie," she called faintly.

Jamie instantly appeared.

"Yes, Claire."

"I'm hungry."

"All right. How are you feeling?"

"Well enough. A little weak, though."

"What would you like?"

"I think a poached egg, Jamie, and some toast and tea. Has the doctor gone?"

"Long ago," answered Jamie; "but he told us to give you something when you woke up."

"What time is it?"

"It's only nine. I'll tell Maggie."

Claire for some minutes lay quite still. She felt fatigued, more so than at any time during the last days, and not inclined to move, but her taut nerves had relaxed themselves, and she was aware that her apprehensions for the future had become less imminent and menacing.

George came in, saying, "Hello," cheerfully, turned up the gas-jet under the green shade, and sat down, adding, with an air of super-brotherly affability, "How are you feeling?" But before Claire could answer a slight clatter sounded in the hall and Maggie, carrying a bed-tray, entered, followed by Jamie, each moving in an aroma of buttered toast, and it struck Claire with a sense of unmistakable relief that Maggie's cheeks were

as red, her stays as tight, her shoes as creaky as they always had been, that George and Jamie, too, were unchanged, and that without, the world was going on precisely as it had before the appalling Nicholson tragedy had for a time blotted it out of appreciable existence.

Jamie placed another pillow at her back. George lighted another gas-jet, and Maggie adjusted the short legs of the bed-tray on either side of Claire's half-recumbent form. Claire poured herself a cup of tea and attacked the poached egg with relish, while George and Jamie lounged about, displaying an obvious determination to be cheerful and fraternally amiable — and this transparent determination arising so clearly out of consideration for herself also helped to raise Claire's spirits. By a tacit understanding family matters were avoided.

"Had an answer from Rockcroft yet?" she heard Jamie ask casually of George.

"Yes, they can give you rooms any time after day after to-morrow, so I wired we'd take them from the tenth for a month."

"Who is that for, George?" Claire asked.

"You and Jamie," George answered.

"Well, I certainly am not going to Rockcroft," Claire replied.

"Why not?" George asked in surprise.

Rockcroft was a small colony in the White Mountains, of almost conventual dullness, where Claire had suffered the martyrdom of boredom many times in the company of Aunt Caroline. It was a favorite resort for

members of the Nicholson church and a numerous band with like proclivities from Brooklyn.

"Because it's the stupidest place that ever existed! I won't go there! I'd rather stay in town."

"All right! All right!" George answered hastily. "You don't have to go if you don't want to. We thought you'd like it. Any place you'd like better?"

"Yes. Atlantic City."

At the mention of this city of sin, as it had been the habit of the elder Nicholsons to regard it, the brothers exchanged involuntary glances of startled admiration, and George, concealing a prideful grin, answered:

"It's awfully crowded and noisy at this time of year —"

"I don't care," Claire answered. "That's what I want. Could n't you telephone down there to some of the hotels and see if they have any rooms?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I could —" George began.

"Then do it now. Please, George!"

"All right!" George acquiesced, rising.

"And no little cheap one on back streets. I want to go to one of the big ones facing the ocean. Do you know their names?"

"I know their names all right. When do you think you would feel well enough to go?"

"Any time, to-morrow or next day. The very thought of it makes me feel better already."

"Well, don't bank on it," cautioned the cautious George. "This is *the* season down there, you know."

George departed. Almost at once Claire called him back.

“And, George, besides our bedrooms I shall want a sitting-room communicating with them — for not less than a month. I’ve got money to pay for everything.”

“Don’t worry about that.”

Her sacrificial mood had for the moment, and under the encouragement of the doctor’s optimism, been lost sight of. At least for a month she would forget if she could her responsibilities, her duties; the past and the future.

CHAPTER XIV

CLAIRE and Jamie, in wheeled chairs, were being pushed by two menials along the Board Walk. The sun setting behind the vast bulks of the hotels cast their translucent shadows across the crowded beach below, out into the tumbling waves, except where occasional gaps in their continuity permitted bands of amber light to illuminate the moving multitudes and the white foam of the breakers.

They had been at Atlantic City for a week, and this week had been one of delightful *dolce far niente*. George had been lucky enough to get really charming rooms for them. The sitting-room on a corner had windows on two sides. Claire's room faced the ocean, and each night, as the salt air, entering suavely through her opened windows, swept her cheeks and hair, she was lulled to sleep by the lazy beat of the surf. Immediately on their arrival they had inaugurated a régime so indolent that it ultimately began to make Claire secretly ashamed. Breakfast, very late, invariably in their sitting-room, extravagant patronage of the wheeled chairs, and hours of perfect idleness, dawdling over a book or lying on the sand. At first Claire was too tired to think much about it one way or the other, and as Jamie was not incapable of doing nothing gracefully, one day followed another in a smooth, lethargic procession; but as

under the stimulus of the change her vigorous vitality revived once more, her indolence became a little irksome, and both she and Jamie began to look about rather wistfully for something wherewith to engage themselves.

They had had one letter from George indicating that the doctor's optimism was not likely to survive the hard facts of Elder's pessimistic forecast, but that there was one eventuality which would help the situation tremendously, and that was the possible purchase of the plant of the Nicholson Company by a prosperous manufacturing company whose works were in the neighborhood. There was nothing definite to be said about it yet, but the syndicate was considering the matter. In the meantime, he was afraid the Ninth Street house would have to go. And also, in the meantime, he admonished Claire not to worry. Claire had already made up her mind not to if she could avoid it, but George's letter brought back relentlessly the fact that things were changed, that her former safeness and security, fictitious though it had shown itself to be, was a thing of the past, and that after the respite Atlantic City afforded her, the indubitable future would await her.


Claire and Jamie submitted themselves to the embraces of the wheeled chairs, and to the propulsive powers of the menials, each with a superb, slightly self-conscious air of luxurious lassitude, and yet their eyes at times moved restlessly, already searching for something wherewith to mitigate the growing tedium of a too per-

fect existence. Jamie looked longingly at the cavernous entrance of a moving-picture palace, at the frivolous façade of a cabaret, at a mosque-like structure concealing within mysterious occult enchantments, and glanced appealingly at Claire; but Claire would not respond. It was only two weeks since — since — and although it seemed much, much longer, it was not to be thought of. She had come to Atlantic City because it was gay, because she knew that she needed an environment of that kind; but to take part in it, even if they were feeling a little bored, would be too unseemly —

“Hello!” cried Jamie suddenly, with an unmistakable note of pleasure in his voice. “There’s Orville!” And Claire, glancing up quickly and following his gaze, saw Orville approaching, also in a wheeled chair. There was something so absurd, to Claire, about the spectacle of the vital and energetic Orville submitting himself to the passive impotence of a wheeled chair, that she laughed aloud. Orville saw them, waved a hand, lifted his hat, and all three joined forces eagerly.

“George told me you were here! I was going to look you up. I’m down for a little vacation.”

Orville, the moment he had heard from George that Claire had gone to Atlantic City, had determined to follow her there, but he had purposely waited a week, shrewdly calculating that if he did so his appearance would be doubly welcome. His restraint was rewarded by both Claire’s and Jamie’s real pleasure at seeing him.



"New York is like a furnace. We're lucky to be out of it. Come and lunch with me at my hotel. It's one o'clock and you're nearly a mile from yours!"

Jamie glanced at Claire, who hesitated.

"Come on, Claire, it can't do any harm!" he urged.

"We'll be as quiet as you like," added Orville.

"Very well," Claire decided. And getting out of their chairs they strolled toward the huge pile where Orville was stopping.

"Are you all right again?" To his tone of friendly solicitude was added something more which was not unpleasant to Claire. Something warmer, more personal, more protecting than he had shown before. His chaffing, bantering manner had disappeared completely. He had become pleasantly serious, sympathetic and simple, but his assured and reliant laugh was still the same, and his careless air of understanding confidence. He met some one at every step, it seemed, with whom he exchanged greetings. The head waiter rushed to meet him as they entered the dining-room, and Claire and Jamie sank into their chairs pleasantly aware of the fact that instead of being rather isolated and lonely outsiders, they had suddenly become significant entities in the cosmography of the town.

Jamie chirruped through his teeth, a trick of his which usually made Orville laugh, and exclaimed. "*This is something like!*"

"Why, Jamie, we've been having a lovely time!" Claire remonstrated.

"I know it, but it's good to see some one you know once more."

"Some one, or any one," said Orville.

"Some much more than others, as you must know, my beamish boy. How's George?"

"Jamie," said Claire reprovingly, "don't be impertinent!"

And Jamie replied, "All right, I won't!"

"That's all right," said Orville, "I don't mind."

"It does n't matter," replied Jamie. "Claire has asked me not to be impertinent, and I'm not going to be."


"What nonsense you're talking, Jamie. You have n't told Mr. Orville what you'd like for luncheon."

"Something rare and expensive," Jamie answered. "I'm not particular."

Claire laughed at Jamie's nonsense which he delivered in his inimitable way, and exchanged amused glances with Orville. She was really delighted to see him, and asked him presently how long he intended to stay.

"Two weeks, perhaps. Perhaps longer," Orville answered. "I find that if I am to keep my efficiency at top-notch I must get away from town pretty often."


She had had a note from him after the tragedy, written with surprising tact and sympathy, and she had noticed that he was in the church on the morning of the funeral, but she had not spoken to him for nearly a month. There was really something warm and pleasant in this renewal of their intercourse. He seemed to sym-



bolize the safety of established things now that her own safety was threatened, and in his company she felt a renewal of her old sense of security.

They sat for a time in a discreet corner of the lounge after luncheon — where Claire allowed herself to smoke a cigarette — listening to the performance of an excellent orchestra, and then Orville walked back with them to their hotel, leaving them at the door.

An east wind which had sprung up during the night had overcast the sky, and they had barely reached their rooms when it began to rain. A dull afternoon was plainly before them. Claire sought solace in a book, and Jamie disappeared somewhere into the recesses of the hotel, reappearing occasionally as he wandered about aimlessly. The moment for dinner arrived with a welcome sense of relief from the monotony of the afternoon, and the concert of the hotel orchestra served to pass an hour afterwards, but on returning to their rooms they found that the storm of wind and rain had increased, beating fiercely against the windows of Claire's room and of their parlor which faced the water, sweeping across the dull expanse of the ocean, and over the deserted beach and promenade. All night the rain beat fiercely, and in the morning Claire woke to find it still driving in from the ocean under a flying canopy of slaty clouds. The aspect of their surroundings had changed completely. The disappearance of the multitudes which swarmed along the front caused the resort to take on an appearance of dejected weariness, of stolid boredom



which communicated itself in turn to the inmates of the hotels. Breakfasting in private suddenly lost its attractions to Claire and Jamie, and they sought the companionship of the public dining-room, but after finishing, the prospect of a morning indoors was found to be insupportable, and getting into mackintoshes, they braved the strong pressure of the Atlantic gale, stepping out briskly along the Board Walk whose saturated surface gleamed grayly with dull reflections. Occasional pedestrians could be seen on its interminable vista, diminishing in the distance to slowly moving specks. The hotels, out of which something vital seemed to have passed, stood inert and lifeless, their blank windows and closed doors giving no hint of activity within. To seaward two coasting vessels were dimly visible through the driving rain, rolling in the gray sea, but moving steadily north, the smoke from their funnels being caught instantly by the wind and swept swiftly toward the shore.


The scene was not an enlivening one, but the movement and rush of the wind, and the whip of the rain on their faces produced in them a sense of strong exhilaration, and presently they found themselves in a gale of laughter racing like children.

"Why, you can run quite well!" Jamie remarked with intentional patronage.

"As well as you!" Claire retorted.

"Can you? All right; I'll race you to that little blue kiosk, eh?"

Claire darted off without replying.



"That's a low trick!" cried Jamie from the rear, and she heard the patter of his feet as he began to exert himself to overtake her. On they flew. Claire was almost a match for him, but not quite. She made every effort, but gradually he drew abreast of her, ahead of her, slowly he passed her, and catching a glimpse of his bent head and downright expression, at the rapid alternation of hands and feet, she began to laugh hysterically, straining to keep up with him, but Jamie momentarily now drew farther and farther ahead. All at once she thought, "I must not laugh like this! It is only two weeks since — since —" But youth would have its way, and it was only when noticing that in their mad rush they were passing Orville's hotel that she became sober and stopped while Jamie still sped on. She had become suddenly self-conscious. What must she look like, giggling hysterically and racing like an overgrown school-girl in that ridiculous manner? She felt certain that bad luck would see to it that Orville would be sitting at one of the windows, and she scanned them furtively.

Jamie, who had discovered her defection, was returning to her teasingly victorious, and they started back toward their hotel. The rain had again increased and they were glad to reach shelter; but two hours had still to be disposed of before luncheon. A general air of weariness and lassitude pervaded the hotel. Claire and Jamie tested its resources without success. Shuffleboard and billiards seemed to have become insupportably inane, and Claire finally went upstairs to her book which was

proving to be hardly absorbing enough to cope with the situation. From time to time she thought of Orville, and that if he had looked them up as she had thought likely, he might have helped her to pass a stolid hour or two. It was now twenty-four since she and Jamie had met him, and they had not heard from him.

After luncheon Jamie disappeared, and on returning about five explained that he had been to Orville's hotel thinking he might meet him. Jamie, too, apparently had been thinking of him. He had not seen Orville, and finally on inquiring at the desk was told that he was not in.

"Let's telephone and ask him to dine with us," Jamie suggested. "We can't stand this much longer."

"No," answered Claire. She was a little piqued at Orville's silence, adding, although she understood perfectly well, "Can't stand what?"

"This mad, exhausting whirl, of course!" responded Jamie. "Come on, let's ask him, Claire!"

"No, Jamie, I shall not!"

"Why?"

"Jamie, as if you did n't know!"

"You mean —?"

"Of course!" And yet Claire knew that their mourning was not the real reason.

"There can't be any harm in it, Claire," he persisted. "Orville has got to dine, and so have we. I don't see why we can't do it together."

"Don't let's argue about it, Jamie!"

Jamie turned sulky — he did n't often — and started toward the door. Just as he reached it the telephone rang close to him. He lifted the receiver, and Claire heard the following monologue:

"Yes. Who is it — Yes, this is Mr. James Nicholson — oh, shut up Central, *if* you please! — *would* we? I should n't wonder. What time? On the minute. Oh, she's all right, only nearly dead with ennui — so am I. Eight o'clock, then. Right-o!" Jamie chirruped into the receiver, hung it up, and looked at Claire with a mingled glance of triumph and defiance. "Orville wants us to dine with him at eight. He's sending his car for us."

"Why did you say I was bored?" Claire demanded. "I am not bored at all! I wish you would n't say such things, Jamie!"

"But you are!"

"I'm not!" Claire declared so downrightly that Jamie answered:

"All right!" quite bewildered; adding, "But you don't mind going, do you?"

"No, I suppose not," Claire replied with unexpected acquiescence, and both were aware that a certain cheer which had been absent before had come into the room. Jamie started once more for the door, and in response to a question from Claire said:

"I'm going to make my toilet."

"But we are n't going for over two hours, Jamie."

"I know it, but I've got to kill the time somehow. Do you know I like Orville much better than I ever

thought I should — do you know why? Because he's such an understanding kind of person."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean he's got as much intellectual curiosity as any Jew. For instance, I'm certain he does n't give a red for music, and yet he knows it's one of the great solvents of life — Jamie stopped and looked at Claire. "Solvents of life! Not bad, eh, Claire? Well — he recognizes it as one of the great solvents of life and he respects it and its devotees, even if he does n't appreciate it himself. That's only one instance. He's that way about everything. He's the most open-minded person, barring Mallette, I ever knew."

"Have you heard from Mr. Mallette, Jamie, since he went away?"

"Did n't I tell you? I got a letter from Chicago. Such a corking letter. He'd seen it in the papers. He sent an awfully nice message to you — I must have left it at home —" And as the subject of Mallette's letter was leading them to the catastrophe, he abandoned it, saying, "But about Orville. He's interested in everything — and he listens to what you have to say!"

"Well, of course you'd like that, Jamie, being something of a talker."

"No, it is n't that, Claire, but I'll bet you that most really big men are good listeners."

"Do you think Mr. Orville is a big man?"

"Yes, I do — I think he is."

"Do you think he is kind?"

"I think he's kind in this way — because he understands things so well — but I don't think he would ever allow his sympathies to govern his conduct."

"That's exactly what I think. I don't think he would even be weakly indulgent with a person because he liked him."

"Oh, I mean more than that," answered Jamie. "I meant that even if he liked and felt sorry for a person, it would n't prevent his smashing him if he stood between him and something he wanted."

"Oh, Jamie, I don't think he's a bad man."

"I did n't say he was, but these men of affairs have a queer code sometimes. In the Street, you know, it's yourself always — yourself only —"

"Do you mean to say they are n't honest?"

"No; but they're pretty ruthless. I've heard George talk — and other people. It's a case of the devil take the hindmost." Jamie turned toward the door once more. "I say, I *must* be getting ready."

CHAPTER XV

THE car that Orville sent proved to be not the superlative limousine they had become familiar with in town, but a formidable open machine equipped for travel. The weather curtains had been put on over the seats, and crawling into the low enclosure which they made, they found Orville's chauffeur at the wheel.

Orville himself met them at the door of the hotel, gay and vigorous. His face glowed with the ruddy tones of health, and his eyes shone clear and sparkling. Claire thought he looked, if not handsome, almost distinguished; and his first words disposed her to forgive his apparent neglect of herself and Jamie.

"You'll never guess how I've been spending the day," he said at once, and he pressed Claire's hand in his powerful grasp.

"Not the way we have, I hope," Jamie answered.

"I would have if I had n't gone to the Country Club and played golf since early morning, in the rain, all by myself."

"What did you do that for?" Claire asked. "You seem to know lots of people here."

"But I did n't come here to see lots of people! I came here to be alone." And to correct the impression that this statement might have made, he added, "I wanted to ask you and Jamie to come out there for tea, but I

was afraid it would n't appeal to you — the journey, I mean — in such weather."

As he spoke, they moved toward the restaurant, and on to Orville's table, where a discreet nosegay smiled a welcome to Claire. The courses of the dinner, which had already been ordered, and which began their procession without delay, were well chosen, cooked, and served. Orville seemed, in fact, to be always well served. He seemed to expect, and to receive, from every situation, the best it had to offer. Orville's progress seemed always to take on the character of an unostentatious triumphal procession — of the concealed but evident prestige of royalty traveling *incognito*, all of which he accepted, not with any evidence of vulgar satisfaction, but as a matter of course.

The management and atmosphere of Orville's hotel, a smart affair which made Claire's seem quite humdrum in comparison, was very welcome after her long confinement. They sat in the lounge for an hour after dinner, when Jamie went to look at the weather, and reporting that it was clearing, Claire decided to return by the Board Walk. Orville accompanied them. As they stepped out of the brilliant interior of the hotel, the solemn majesty of night and the sea spoke to Claire augustly, as it had done more than once, commanding her to silence. The wind was shifting toward the north. An occasional star shone, but there was no moon, and across the ocean her glance was lost in the darkness of an illimitable void. Nearer to the secret sense of things

she seemed than at any other time or place, nearer the key to the mysteries of birth, life, death, the meaning of the material universe, nearer thus, facing Nature in its most majestic aspect, than among the prying swarms of insatiable humanity, or among all the books written by man to explain the baffling silence which surrounds him. Something vague and beautiful seemed to lift Claire's senses for a moment, up and up, until she became conscious again of the cheerful banter of Orville and Jamie beside her.

"So you are a Jerseyite," Jamie was saying quizzically.

"Yes," Orville answered. "Born among the sand-dunes, the scrub-pines, and the mosquitoes." And presently he added, turning to Claire, "Do you know the country about here?"

Claire answered that she did not.

"Then will you and Jamie come with me to-morrow morning? I will show you some of it — and perhaps we can find a place for luncheon."

"I should like to," Claire answered, hardly hearing; and almost with a sigh, she murmured, "How beautiful it is!"

Orville looked at her as if wishing to search quickly for her meaning, and Claire, noticing, continued, "The night, I mean. The clouds and the stars, after the rain!"

Orville looked above him for an instant — Claire could not tell whether he understood or not — and turning toward her again he said, "Then I shall call for

you at ten." He seemed to reveal in his eye the gleam of a sudden resolve.

Orville, who was always scrupulously punctual unless it served his purpose not to be, was announced precisely at ten. After the storm, Nature had relapsed into a phase of complete quiescence. The air, moist and perfectly still, while yet cool, gave promise of increasing warmth during the day. Orville had brought his open car, driving it himself, with a hamper in case they should be unable to find luncheon anywhere, and they started toward the north, gradually leaving the coast behind, over narrow, level roads still dotted with shallow pools of rain-water, which Orville's car dashed resolutely aside in showers of muddy drops.

Suddenly Claire became aware that they were winding in gradual curves through a dense growth of scrub-pine. They went on, mile after mile. Occasionally an open road would be met, and rough clearings would open out, revealing a dilapidated house or two, built of unpainted clapboards. But immediately on passing them, the forest would close in upon them again, almost brushing the wheels of the car.

They went on for miles, threading an interminable wilderness of trees. The day grew momentarily more oppressive. An immense blanket of humid air enveloped them, and from the horizon the occasional rumbling thunder warned them of approaching storms. Orville, whose assured confidence had been giving place

some time past to a perplexed uncertainty, suddenly uttered an exclamation of satisfaction, and turned sharply to the right into a wide, rough road crossing that on which he had been driving. He followed this road for a hundred yards, perhaps, swerved from it again into a narrow lane through other serried ranks of scrub-pines, and emerging close to a deserted, dilapidated railway station which stood beside a line of rusty rails, drew up opposite a small, unpainted house that stood across the way, the front portion of whose first story was fitted with shop windows, where behind dirty panes a meager assortment of the miscellaneous objects of a country store could be seen. Three men, wearing wide-brimmed, ragged straw hats and soiled and faded overalls, lounged on the steps of the store, smoking corn-cob pipes and languidly spitting into the dusty road.

A clearing of perhaps a hundred acres surrounded them, bearing evidence of wretched and desultory cultivation, and here and there upon this expanse a few small shanties stood dejectedly, as if their builders had erected them with a minimum of interest or effort.

In the doorway of one of them a woman wearing a gingham sun-bonnet stood bending over a washtub. Two children were driving a cow, with apparent aimlessness of purpose, across a field. The air quivered in the insufferable heat, made more apparent by their cessation of motion. Orville, without speaking, sat with Claire beside him, observing this scene with an ex-

pression which seemed compounded of distaste, interest, almost amazement.

Claire looked at him questioningly, not understanding why they should stop in this depressing place. Orville, seeming to understand, indicated a boy who had come out of the country shop. He wore a ragged shirt and trousers, but no hat, nor shoes, nor stockings. His skin was burned brown, and his hair was bleached almost white by the sun. He edged his way between two of the loungers and seated himself on the bottom step.

"Thirty years ago, I was that boy," said Orville.

Claire, resting listlessly in the languor of the torrid day, stirred with a little movement of interest, and gave him again a questioning glance.

"Forty years ago I was born in that house," continued Orville.

"Born there," repeated Claire, almost in stupefaction — the mere thought seemed so preposterous. "But how — how did you get away?"

"I ran away," answered Orville, "when I was about as old as that very boy; in shirt and trousers — without a cent in my pocket, without a hat, without shoes. My father kept the store. He was so like them that he might have been any one of the three men you see sitting on the steps, without ambition, energy, or intellect. My mother I do not remember."

"Was your father cruel to you?" Claire asked.

"He was neither cruel nor kind; he was a complete

most as God had brought him into the world, and achieving while still young the power and influence of wealth — a strange and fascinating tale, under the influence, as she still was, of that recent realization of her own defenselessness.

He revealed himself as she had not fully understood him before, a powerful and determined personality, and as she listened she thought of Mallette's history, and the story of his renunciation seemed drab and unreal compared to the color and daring of Orville's achievements. Mallette, having all, had thrown that all away. Orville's struggles gave point to the real value of what Mallette had so lightly cast aside; and it seemed to Claire that while one may value material things too much, Mallette, through some defect of character, had valued them too little. And in Orville's story there was pathos too — to Claire — Orville himself was plainly unaware of it, although from the first he possessed those indomitable traits which seemed to clothe him in armor.

When at last they came out from the shaded restaurant into the torrid glare of the summer afternoon, it was four o'clock, and they were thirty miles from Atlantic City. Occasional rumblings of thunder still sounded, and dark clouds had begun to gather on the horizon. The car darted forward toward the coast under Orville's skillful driving. Claire settled herself in the low seat beside him. The rush of the wind cooled her face, and the subdued, rhythmic murmur of the engine soothed her senses. Orville's story still seethed in her imagination.

They reached the coast and turned south. A curtain of black clouds, shot momentarily with tortuous threads of lightning, hung to the west, against which the seagulls whirled like bits of paper, dazzling white. The curtain of cloud swept nearer. The reverberations of thunder grew more ominous. Orville increased his speed. Claire could feel at times the muscular tension of his strong arm as he held the wheel. The wind dashed against her face, and a strong exhilaration seized her. Great and wild forces seemed to surround her; the storm, the whirling seagulls, the wind, the powerful surge of the car, and that strong, purposeful, and yet mysterious man who sat beside her.

Orville, quickly withdrawing his gaze for a moment from the road, turned it to her, and said, "Did my story interest you?"

"Oh, yes," Claire answered, "so much!"

"You don't think any the less of me?" Claire looked at him in astonishment:

"What do you mean?"

"Some women would," he said.

They had reached the city, and as he turned into the road leading to Claire's hotel, drops of rain began to fall, the thunder-clouds had darkened the sky, and the preliminary gusts of wind, indicating that the storm was on them, blew through the streets.

"I have never told it before to man or woman, barring an anecdote or two here and there," said Orville. "I told you because I knew it would make no

difference in your opinion of me, whatever that might be."

"It was wonderfully interesting," Claire answered.

The car stopped before the door of the hotel.

"May I come and see you to-morrow afternoon?"

Orville had sat motionless in the car for a moment before making this request; and this slight action seemed to invest it with a peculiar significance.

Claire suddenly felt herself in the clutches of a strange embarrassment; she bent her head to hide a flush which she knew had risen to her cheeks, and, vexed at herself for it, answered stumbingly:

"Yes — please — do come!"

At the desk she found a letter from George.

The syndicate he had already mentioned, which had been considering the purchase of the works, had decided to take them. The terms were not what he would have liked, but it was a timely chance, and properties of that kind are always hard to sell. In addition a purchaser had been found for the Ninth Street house, who would take it as it stood, except, of course, their personal effects. It was an opportunity which might not occur again. With the money raised from these two transactions, and from the other assets, he thought that the creditors would be paid, barring, of course, members of the family. Aunt Caroline's estate had a very large claim against both Uncle Edward and the company, as had she and Jamie. The purchaser of the house was in no

especial hurry for it, and he (George) would make arrangements to keep the servants on, so that Claire could stay away as long as she chose and take as much time as she might want to pack in a leisurely manner. Claire stopped.

"Oh, Jamie!" she cried.

They had gone to their rooms, and she could see Jamie, who was dressing for dinner, standing before his mirror, tying a cravat.

The storm had begun, and the sound of the torrents of rain beating against their windows was broken momentarily by sharp peals of thunder.

"What is it?" answered Jamie, turning at the pain in her voice, and coming into their sitting-room.

"They have sold the house."

"Then haven't we any place to go?" he cried quickly.

"We may have it for a few weeks, to pack — but after that —!"

After that, what? Her absolute inability to answer the question appalled her. Her very good sense enabled her to realize the difficulties which another woman — in fact, most women — would be inclined to minimize. She did not for a moment imagine that George, or even her Aunt Adelaide, or other relatives more distant, would allow either herself or Jamie to starve. Her questionings did not descend to such ultimate foundations, but the sale of the Ninth Street house showed that the image and nucleus of her old life were to be swept away,

and that something must be faced, so new, strange, and difficult, that she shrank from it with instinctive dread.

"But, Claire, what is to become of us?"

"We shall get along somehow. Other people have. I have two thousand dollars."

"Surely not much, Claire!"

"No, not much. We must n't stay here now, Jamie, it's so expensive; we must go back at once."

"If my opera was only finished!"

"Yes, but they say it takes so long — such things."

"And the clever George, of course, has taken care of George!"

"Hush, Jamie!"

"He might divide that hundred thousand with us, but of course he won't."

"I won't hear you say such things, Jamie. It is his."

"Very well," Jamie answered gloomily, "but it's ours too. Well, let's go down to dinner. When had we better go back to town?"

"To-morrow morning. I will tell them to-night that we are going."

"But Orville is coming to-morrow afternoon!"

"I'll telephone that I shall not be here. Will you look up the trains after dinner, Jamie?"

Dinner passed almost in silence. During it the storm passed, and Claire, going up to her room, saw from her window a drenched world below, and above a stretch of calm evening sky, with the thinnest, thread-like cres-

cent of a new moon hung in its blue depths — a symbol whose meaning she could not read.

Jamie had gone in search of time-tables, and putting on her hat she went quickly out, eager to stand in the benignant quietude of the evening. The promenade was still deserted. The sea moved lazily and the strings of electric lights shone like pale pearls, robbed as they were of their brilliance by the flush of the afterglow, which seemed reluctant to withdraw its magic radiance from the world.

Claire walked slowly, stopping at times to look out over the ocean. Something in the unearthly beauty of the afterglow, tinting the distances of sky and sea, which spread their immensities above and beyond her, woke in her a sudden sense of the pathos of human endeavor, and again she searched for its meaning.

Far into the future this panorama of beauty would recur for the coming ages. New generations would live, new races develop, new cities rise, destined in time to give way to still other cities, other generations, other races, an endless succession, while the panorama of the master-builder moved eternally in its slow procession — but why? — for what purpose? — and as youth is wont, Claire, with troubled eyes, asked herself these unanswerable questions.

She moved on, too absorbed to notice Orville's figure, leaning against the balustrade of the promenade, until he spoke to her. He had been looking out, as Claire had been, over the sea. Claire joined him. _

for him. I must n't boast, but I have a good deal of influence. I would help him, anyway, of course, but doing it together would be such pleasure — there are so many things we could do together. And I would keep you so safe — not restricted — don't misunderstand me — because in that way you would be free as air — but so safe against all the rough and difficult places; and let me tell you that I know how rough and difficult life can be. It would make me so happy, keeping you safe from harm. You would be so safe, and yet so free."

"I know," Claire answered at last; "you would give me so much, and I have nothing!"

"You would give me something worth more than all that I could possibly give you."

"And Jamie, too!"

"Do you know what my life is like?" Orville asked. "It is the loneliest possible. Come, you and Jamie, and drive my loneliness away. Give me your hand."

Claire, without an impulse of opposition, extended her hand, and, taking it, he kissed it, seized her shoulders with a strong and yet careful grasp, and drawing her slightly toward him, said —

"Look at me."

In the fading light he saw her eyes again looking at him, a little defiant, a little frightened; and releasing her, he closed his hands, as if in supplication.

"Will you come, Claire, you and Jamie?" And stooping to listen he heard her "*Yes*," almost inaudible, mingled as it was with the lazy tumbling of the breakers.

CHAPTER XVI

"THE cook wants to know if you will be home to lunch, ma'am."

This from Maggie, who, clothed in an extremely tight black dress, with strikingly smart apron and wristbands, had knocked at Claire's door.

"No, I shall not. I thought I had told her," Claire answered.

She was standing before her mirror, adjusting a hat, but she turned to give Maggie an appraising look. Maggie, whose bosom, while larger than ever, looked almost genteel in its black, buttoned rigidity, and whose reddish hair was done up with a neatness unknown in the past, retreated from the door and collided with a smart, slim Swedish parlor-maid. The parlor-maid caromed from Maggie's solid form and they exchanged supercilious glances. The parlor-maid knocked at the door.

"Yes!" Claire answered.

"Mr. Matsuki would like to know if you will be home to lunch, ma'am," she asked; Matsuki being the Japanese butler.

"No, I shall not. I am going out now and shall probably not be back until seven."

The parlor-maid closed the door and withdrew. Claire, not liking the hat, took it off with a slight exclamation of dissatisfaction and elaborate precautions against

disarranging her hair, returned it to the box from which she had taken it, and after a glance at a tiny wrist-watch, sat down in a padded chair which stood by one of the windows. It was early, and she need not hurry.

A winter had passed since she and Jamie had gone to Atlantic City, and the forces of spring would soon be stirring once more in the trees of the adjacent square. She was in the Ninth Street house, but it had been changed beyond recognition. Orville had been its purchaser. Claire had been touched and very grateful when he told her, but his additional statement that he had already let contracts for its entire renovation had dismayed her. Hardly anything but the walls was to be retained. The old home was to pass away and yet Orville's evident belief that Claire would enjoy this transformation, prevented her from protesting. The bedroom in which she sat was on the floor below the one she had originally occupied — one flight up instead of two — and until the previous summer had not existed at all. It had been added to the house immediately over the library, adjoining what had been the large rear bedroom — Caroline's, in fact. Claire therefore had a complete suite. Caroline's former bedroom was now her sitting-room, her new bedroom opened from it, and opening from one side of the new bedroom a superb bathroom had been built. These changes had seemed absolutely necessary to Orville, who wished to see Claire's beauty installed in a commensurate setting.


In stating that Claire's bedroom was now one flight

up instead of two, a slight error has been committed. While it had been moved down one flight, the entrance to the house had also been moved down, so that she was still two flights from the entrance door.

The shifting of the entrance door had been accomplished by removing the old high stoop, building a window where the former front door had been, and making the main entrance to the house in the basement floor. Edward's den had been transformed into an entrance hall, and the drawing-room above now occupied the whole front of the house. A passage had been built so that the dining-room could be reached without the necessity of going through the library, as formerly, and this had become Orville's study. Orville's private suite was on the same floor as Claire's: the small front room, his bedroom, the large front room, his sitting- and dressing-room from which his bathroom, old, but transmogrified, opened, lighted by a shaft from above.

Jamie still occupied his old quarters. He had been offered Claire's former room, but had declined it. He liked his own best.

Claire watched these operations — while acceding to them because Orville so obviously wanted them and was so obviously certain that Claire wanted them too — with a double misgiving. First, because every vestige of the old house — the home she loved — was disappearing, and second, because, brought up in the careful Nicholson tradition, it seemed unwise to spend so much in a district which was clearly declining in value as a



residential quarter; but to Orville money was plainly not a thing to be conserved with care or expended cautiously. Orville, as if possessed of some secret magic by which money could be instantly and without effort created out of nothing, seemed to regard the most extravagant expenditure, even at the inflated prices of the moment, with unconcern. Finally an electric lift had been installed, and a new story built at the top of the house for the accommodation of the additional servants required under the new régime.

Claire sat in her low chair and looked out. The tenements were still there, unchanged, except that they seemed older, shabbier, and more dejected. This may have been because her new room was twenty feet nearer than the old. Although it was March the day was so unusually mild that their windows were open once more, and once more their varied sounds assaulted her ears.

Claire, who was beginning to know life as she had not known it before, sitting with her chair pushed back a little, so that she would not easily attract attention, watched curiously.

In the rooms from which the crowded family had disappeared so suddenly the summer before, a stout old woman with a sardonic countenance was leaning idly out of the windows, smoking a clay pipe, and resting on a pillow which she had placed on the sill. Lolling in this way, on pillows, was a common tenement practice, Claire had observed. Behind her, Claire could see a young woman who continually interrupted her opera-

tions on a cooking-stove to cuff and push a number of children who were moving about in the two dirty rooms.

Directly opposite, and on the same level, a little swarthy creature with dense, blue-black Latin hair was rocking a baby who cried persistently as Claire looked. This little dark creature caught sight of her and with a quick movement darted beyond the range of her vision. The cries of babies and the voices of children generally, crying and shouting, rose from many places. The houses seemed full of them. So nature worked, demanding greater fecundity where the process of living was more difficult.

Claire had matured, grown handsomer, and a little heavier. She had developed in fact into a superb and formidable beauty.

She got up presently, looked again at her watch, produced another hat, put it on, and descended the stairs. The stairway, instead of running straight down as before, descended in a graceful curve — the old solid walnut banisters had given way to a light Louis XVI railing in iron — and came to an end in a square central hall. Claire crossed this room and descended to the entrance hall by another graceful curve. The Japanese butler, with a smiling and harmonious manner, opened the front door, and as he did so a footman opened the door of a little jewel of a motor which stood waiting for her. This motor, in fact, shining with polished brass and lacquer, resembled not a jewel so much as a casket for one.

Claire, the jewel, entered, sank into its cushions, the footman mounted beside the chauffeur, and the jewel casket glided away.

This procedure was witnessed secretly every day by most of the ladies of the block if they happened to be at home, and each had subconsciously admitted that if they had not known Claire so well, such lavish magnificence in such a retired part of town would have led them to conjecture that Orville had installed among them one of those ladies who under all circumstances delight in showing that they are being well paid for their services. Claire, too, was beginning to have thoughts of this nature, and as the chauffeur, obeying instructions communicated to him by the footman who had received them from Claire, guided the motor suavely up the Avenue, she began to review the past eighteen months since that blessed demonstration on the Avenue when it was thought the war was over and which seemed so fraught with promise for the future. And what had that future brought! Increasing unrest and turbulence. Vast social upheavals, the old tyrannies renewed, rebellions, strikes, wars still progressing in many places, hunger, starvation, plagues, cynical indifference, and people like herself immersed in a kind of fabulous luxury out of all harmony with the essence of the time.

The motor stopped before a large building in the neighborhood of Forty-Second Street which Claire entered. At sight of her, the liveried creature whose intellectual duty it was to see that the elevators observed

some kind of periodic intervals between arrival and departure, approached with an agitated, slavish deference, bowed obsequiously, hurriedly led the way to a waiting elevator, ushered Claire into it, banged the door in the faces of a number of people hurrying for it, and signaled the operator to ascend. The starter's agitation having communicated itself to the operator, he obeyed nervously, started the car so suddenly that Claire's knees almost gave way beneath her, shot to the third floor, and, fumbling with the lock, finally succeeded in sliding back the door, which opened immediately into a classic but spacious vestibule lined with marble, in which a robust young lady with blondined hair sat before a telephone switchboard.

This switchboard was not of the usual commercial type produced by an unimaginative telephone company, but of a special, elegant, classic design, as was the chair in which the operator sat.

A classic bench with a deep-blue velvet cushion supported the forms of three weary youths, and a number of men of the super-prosperous business type paced restlessly about while waiting evidently a summons to enter one of the three doors which gave access from Orville's vestibule to Orville's offices. Two of these three doors were momentarily opening and closing to give egress or ingress to hurrying employees or other super-prosperous business men.

Above the classic bench a large panel, let into the marble wall and framed in a carved border, displayed

in elegant gilt lettering the names of a long list of corporations:

The Alodine Utilities Co.
The Alaska Navigation and Developing Co.
The North Star Light and Power Co.
The Labrador and Northwestern Railway Co.
The Fantail Copper Co.

— and a dozen others. These were Orville's companies.

Claire stepped into this scene of business vigor with some confusion. She had never previously taken either of the three elevators which opened into Orville's vestibule, but a fourth, which gave access to a passage beyond one of the three doors already mentioned, which led immediately to Orville's private room. The starter had evidently made a mistake scarcely excusable even for his limited intelligence. At her appearance the weary youths, still of an age which kindled only to certain flapper ideals, remained as weary and impassive as ever; but each super-prosperous-business man straightened himself slightly, congratulated himself that his clothes were faultless, his hair properly trimmed, and his finger-nails brightly polished, and with an energetic gesture removed his hat, although all had been wearing them in the presence of the switchboard operator, who was really quite handsome, too, although, of course, not obviously super-prosperous, as was Claire.

Although Claire had never — that she could remember — seen the telephone operator before, the latter rose smilingly, saying, "I guess you must have taken

the wrong elevator, Mrs. Orville"; and opened the door which led to Orville's private room.

Orville really had two private rooms; one in which he carried on all the meetings, conferences, and discussions of his multifarious schemes; directed, dictated, telephoned, and held general sway; and another inner room which he allowed few to enter, and of which indeed few knew the existence. It was this latter room which was reached by the fourth elevator and the private passage. Orville came and went in this way, and Claire, too, on her occasional visits, but no one else. If she found the room empty, she pressed a button which rang a little bell in his outer office. If he did not respond, by going into the outer office and pressing another bell, she could summon a good-looking female secretary who could tell her whether Orville had gone out or was in some other part of the office. On this occasion Claire touched the little button, and as Orville did not answer she pushed open the door of the inner office and was about to enter, when the door leading to the outer offices burst open and Orville darted in, hurried to his desk, and called a number into the mouthpiece of the telephone — "Hello! Just a moment, Claire. Come in!" And he began to give unintelligible, rapid instructions to some unknown being, listening presumably, in some unknown cubicle of the ten million which house the dwellers of the city. He finished presently, sprang up, and came around to Claire, beckoning her into the inner room.

"How pretty you look."

He drew her to him with a strong pressure, and kissed her, first her cheek, then her lips.

"Don't, Dudley, some one might come in."

"No one comes here," Orville answered; and he kissed her again.

"But, Dudley, they might — "

"Do you suppose I have n't seen to it that I may kiss my wife without being found out!" And seating himself he drew her irresistibly to his knee.

Claire blushed and attempted to release herself.

"Please, Dudley, I shall be angry!"

Orville released her and sprang up.

"Why? Stay and lunch with me. I can't go out, but I'll have something sent in. Come, we'll be very cozy."

"No, Dudley; Helena is lunching with me at Delmonico's and we're going to the matinée. I came for some money. It's Saturday; the bank is closed and I find I have n't any."

"Have you anything there to draw, even if it were open? Come now!"

"Oh, plenty," answered Claire. "I don't spend my allowance, nearly."

Orville took a note from his pocket-book and handed it to her.

"Good gracious, how reckless you are! How can I spend a hundred dollars on luncheon? Give me ten. Are you made of money?"

"It's simply been rolling in, Claire. Do you know, sometimes I say to myself, 'Why don't you try some-

thing that's really difficult? This game has got to be too easy for you!' But it's the only one worth while."

"The only one" — began Claire — "In times like this — !"

"There's only one other — politics — and the politicians have to come to us."

"But, now, Dudley, with the world so hurt, so maddened with suffering, we don't want politics. We want just brotherly kindness and help."

"Look here, Claire, there's too much sentimental nonsense of that sort nowadays. The war gave us an advantage and gave us money. Let's keep them. They'll be trying to get them away from us soon enough."

"Oh, as if that were everything, Dudley," began Claire, alive to the inadequacy of Orville's pronouncement.

Orville thought — "What a beauty!" and said to himself, "Why are n't you satisfied? What more do you want!"

Her little brown, pointed slippers, her gown, her gloves, her hat, her figure, her complexion, her eyes, her hair, were all perfect.

"Don't bother your head about such things," he said — "kiss me." And he sought her lips, once more pressing her to him, and perhaps detecting a concealed reluctance in Claire's submission, he asked, "Are you displeased with me for making money?"

"When you give me such lovely things! Why, Dud-

ley! Besides, you started it!" And she moved away from him. "I must go now."

"One more kiss," Orville demanded; and as Claire hesitated almost imperceptibly, he grasped her once more and drew her to him.

Claire found Helena sitting in the lounge when she reached Delmonico's and apologized for being late, saying that Orville had kept her.

"If I were Dudley I would keep you too," Helena answered with a laugh which annoyed Claire, "You are growing so handsome, Claire. If I were a man I should love you!" And Helena made eyes at her. "Oh, Claire, how does it seem, being loved by such a strong creature as Dudley? What would make it more fascinating about Dudley is that one could never be sure of him."

They seated themselves and Helena rattled on:

"Perhaps I should n't have said that. But what I meant was that any man like Dudley, so strong and self-reliant, is more or less a law unto himself. I was n't thinking of Dudley especially, and, oh, Claire, I have met such a fascinating man — a Polish officer — a perfect warrior type — such a chest, and such biceps! He let me touch them — they felt like iron under his coat-sleeves."

"Good Heavens!" thought Claire. "If she is going to talk about men I shall be bored to death."

"Claire! There he is now! Don't look until I tell you!

I don't want him to see me to-day, I'm sure I'm not looking well. Now, Claire, straight across between those two tables — the small dark one sitting with the tall blond."

Claire looked, and could not help laughing. She saw a short, thick-set, powerful-looking man, with a bullet-shaped skull, a heavy, blue-black jowl, incredibly fierce mustaches, and a very low forehead.

"Helena, you don't really like him!"

"I do; he's quite fascinating, and such a flirt. Sometimes he quite frightens me."

"What does Aunt Adelaide think of him?"

"You don't suppose I'd let mamma see him, do you? She does n't even know he exists. She is like everybody else. She does n't approve of most foreigners. She thinks the only people worth talking about are the English. You cannot blame her. A woman I know had an affair with an Italian who turned out to be nothing but a Milanese photographer. *I* knew him; he was so distinguished-looking and had such good manners that *any one* would have thought he belonged to the nobility."

"I don't suppose you know anything about your Pole, do you?"

"But this woman almost *married* her Italian! You don't suppose I'm going to *marry* him, Claire? But they *do* know how to make love — ah-h! The trouble is that none of them have any money. All they can manage is to take you to tea sometimes, and you always have a feeling that even that is more than they can

afford. You may be sure that he wouldn't be here now if he had n't been invited. The tall blond he is with is rather fascinating, don't you think?"

Helena accompanied all this with mannerisms which were characteristic of her; sinuous movements of her body which displayed its soft and rounded contours under the close draperies of her fragile gown, while from the shadow cast by her wide hat, her eyes, with slightly darkened lashes, showed humid, soft, and universally inviting.

"Why, there's Jamie!" Claire exclaimed. She had seen a pair of sloping shoulders across the room, and a musicianly profile surmounted by a cap of glossy hair brushed sleekly backwards.

"With a woman?" asked Helena.

Claire leaned forward — "No, it's — why, yes, it's Mr. Mallette." Jamie had seen her, and was waving a greeting. "Shall we ask them to join us? They're just beginning their coffee."

"All right," Helena answered, non-committally, and Claire signaled Jamie.

[She had not seen Felix Mallette since bidding him good-bye on that tragic day, but through Jamie she had heard of him from time to time. His company had been unsuccessful and had been disbanded somewhere in the West and he had stayed on there. Jamie thought that he had been having what Jamie said he, Mallette, would have called a "thin" time. Her relationship with him had never been, objectively, other

than impersonal, and yet she had been conscious from the first that he occupied a special place in her inner thoughts. She had hardly analyzed this feeling, but it had always remained with her, faintly enduring. At first after her marriage she had not thought or allowed herself to think of him, but since her relations with Dudley had begun to cause increasing weariness and discontent, those special feelings had begun to return. Mallette greeted them with evident pleasure and flushed slightly, a thing Claire knew intuitively he did rarely, and some subconscious interchange of feeling, faint, disturbing and yet not unpleasant, seemed to pass between them.

"What do you suppose Mallette has done with the 'Willow of Wei-hai-wei'?" Jamie began immediately when greetings had been exchanged and they had seated themselves at Claire's table. This was Jamie's opera.


"Is some one going to put it on for you?" Claire cried delightedly.

"Not quite as good as that," Mallette answered, "only some one to publish the waltz."

"Every orchestra in town will be playing it by next autumn — perhaps!" added Jamie and hummed a bar or two, accompanying himself with one hand on the tablecloth.

"Oh, Jamie dear, that's lovely! You must be very grateful to Mr. Mallette."

"Well, rather — I feel like celebrating the happy event."



Jamie always felt like that, but since Claire's marriage his celebrations had been really quite innocent, as far as Claire knew. Except once. Once he had come home quite drunk, and had in this condition met Dudley. There had been no half-measures about Dudley's treatment of the situation. If it happened again Jamie would go into the street, to shift for himself without one penny to help him from either Claire or Dudley — and both Claire and Jamie knew that he would do precisely that, and that promises and appeals would be quite useless. Since then he had behaved so well that the idea of sending him to Paris had been almost forgotten, and he was studying harmony and thoroughbass at a local conservatory.

"What are you doing this afternoon, Claire?"

"Helena and I are going to a matinee."

"Let's go, too, Mallette — I know we have n't been asked, but the theater's surely large enough for four. What are your seat numbers, Claire?"

"Yes, do come; you might be able to get seats near us." And Claire gave him the numbers.

A page appeared at Claire's side, saying that Mr. Orville wanted her on the telephone. Dudley had four seats for the theater that evening, and suggested that Claire bring Helena back for dinner. If Jamie could n't make a fourth, they would get some one else —

"But Helena will want to dress. Men never seem to understand such things."

"Then we'll call for her, and dine uptown somewhere."

"Very well; and we just happened to meet Jamie. He was lunching here. If he can't go, I'll let you know."

Jamie proposed that they walk to the theater, which was close at hand, and as the traffic had just been halted as they came out, he darted across the Avenue with Helena. Claire and Mallette adopted a more dignified pace. Claire knew that if Dudley had seen them he would not have approved. When Jamie had made his suggestion she had noticed, too, that Helena had received it coolly. Her first infatuation for Mallette had passed completely. Claire, knowing that Helena was always absorbed in some flirtation, which seemed always to burn itself out with the heatless brilliance of phosphorescence, leaving her unscarred, was not surprised at her indifference. To Helena as well as Dudley, Mallette was now only a member of a rather dubious profession, and although Claire resented this attitude, it made her uncomfortable, and she felt slightly annoyed at Jamie for being responsible for placing her at Mallette's side, and yet, as she glanced at him, this annoyance melted away and was replaced by something sweet — a sweetness vague but faintly terrifying which seemed to seal her lips.

At the theater Claire and Helena went immediately to their seats. Jamie was to try to get others near them, but was unsuccessful, for Claire did not see them again until they were coming out.

The play was "Justice," Galsworthy's exposition of a human institution which the accretions of genera-

tions have distorted out of human shape. Helena asked why on earth Claire had got seats for anything so lugubrious, but Claire did not even hear her. From the first line she was impervious to any sensation outside those conveyed to her by the actors on the stage, carried on by the sad and inexorable current of the play to its tragic conclusion; and in the person of Falder, she for some reason saw Mallette. The actor who took this part, an Englishman in build and complexion, resembled him, and this, together with Mallette's history, caused her, partly involuntarily and partly of her own volition, to lend herself to the impression that it was to Mallette she was listening. Something about Mallette's revolt and sacrifice impressed her with the idea — perhaps he was the stuff of which martyrs are made, chosen by fate to point the way to others, by the tragic lessons of their own lives; and this illusion made even more vivid the pathos of the play, and caused the tears, which she could not forbear to shed, to seem like the expression of some intimate grief. Something strange and poignant had touched her, in the restaurant, when, without warning, she had seen Mallette once more.

Helena, who had wept, too, was herself again, and again reproached Claire lightly for taking her to such a horrid play; but Claire could not speak, and it was only with a determined effort that she controlled herself by the time they reached the brighter light of the street.

Jamie and Mallette joined them as they stood waiting for Claire's motor, which was to meet them there. They

stood at one side, on the pavement, under the glass canopy of the theater, in a delicious atmosphere balmy and translucent, and in this soft effluence the material world, even life itself, seemed to Claire, for the moment, transmuted into something more suave, more benign, than she had begun to believe it to be, and as the motor drew in before them, she gave her hand to Mallette, saying:

“We are in Ninth Street still — I still have my day” — an invitation which Helena, she noticed, did not repeat, and as she turned toward the motor again, she saw that the door had opened and that Dudley was stepping out.

CHAPTER XVII

MALLETTE bowed, and was lost to sight in the crowded thoroughfare. Claire offered to drop Helena at her house, but she preferred to walk. It was agreed that she was to be called for at seven. Claire, Orville, and Jamie got in, and as they started on their way to Ninth Street Orville said:

"Who was the gentleman?"

"Who! Oh, that was Mallette," Jamie answered.

"Mallette!" Claire could not tell whether Orville had really forgotten or not.

"Yes, my friend the English actor — don't you remember?"

"The actor! Oh, yes; he claimed to be some relation of Mallette's of London — yes, I remember him. And there is a dead-line between actors, and people of that kind, and my house."

"People of that kind!" Jamie repeated indignantly. "He's a gentleman! Besides, he was n't *in* your house."


"And I don't intend he shall be."

"But, brother, I don't cotton to ideas like that" — Jamie was beginning to be waggish, but the look in Orville's eye checked him, as it sometimes did.

The car stopped, and, going to her room, Claire seated herself by the window and began to review the scenes of the play. The impression it had made was so

vivid that by closing her eyes she could see its pictures once more, framed by the brilliant oblong of the proscenium. The temptation and the first lapse from honesty. The prison, that machine in which not only the prisoners, but the administration itself, were enmeshed in the web which in time entangles all human institutions — the way which finally stood plainly open, but which blind justice closed again — and the final tragedy.

Undreamed-of human vistas opened before her — dark, pitiful, and tragic — and as her glance rested on the tenements she saw them suddenly with different eyes. Through all those years they had been presenting their pictures to her, and without understanding she had looked at them, coldly, without interest, giving them a half glance, to turn away presently to some trivial duty, as if they had been, not living creatures like herself, but tableaux thrown on a screen for her inspection. She remembered now two words which Mallette had used, some time in the past, and she understood now what they meant. "Social consciousness." That was what Galsworthy and others were working for, trying to develop in people a social consciousness, so that this cold indifference to human privation, which she now knew was characteristic of herself and of most people, might be done away with. Because it *was* indifference. She knew that if a story of hunger, of misfortune, came to her knowledge, it would make her, for the moment, sad. She would sincerely pity the unfortunate protagonist of the tale of misery — and forget; so would others. That



was what Galsworthy was writing for, hoping to arouse the social conscience, so that people would n't forget, and until, instead of being content with passive sympathy, an active and persistent determination would grow up to right the wrongs of people too weak, or too handicapped, to right them for themselves. Mallette had said that the war might develop this consciousness, but at moments like this it seemed as if all the fearful lessons of the immediate past had taught people less than nothing.

She looked at her watch. In twenty minutes Dudley would be knocking at her door, asking if she were ready. He was always disconcertingly punctual. Dudley chaffed her continually about her lack of promptness. The very watch which she wore on her wrist, and which she forgot to look at so often, he had given her so that he might not be kept waiting. She did not in the least want to go. She had been up late so often lately. She knew that it meant supper somewhere after the theater, and getting to bed very late again, but she began to dress hurriedly, making such haste that when Orville knocked, she was ready for him — that is, she called, "Come in, I'm ready."

Orville entered perfectly fresh, cool, and unfatigued. Claire was dressed, but had not yet put on her hat, and as he knew that this would take ten minutes, he sat down and lighted a cigarette, observing:

"Did you lunch at Delmonico's?"

Claire felt that Dudley's not very deft method of

opening the conversation — he knew quite well that she was to lunch at Delmonico's — was for the purpose of having Mallette's appearance at the theater explained to him.

"Yes, we lunched there," Claire answered. "Jamie was there with Mr. Mallette, but they were almost finished when we got there. Jamie wanted to go to the theater with us, but he could n't get seats near us, so we only saw them again, afterwards!"

The story of the play flashed again across her vision. She paused, and was about to add, "Oh, Dudley, must I go with you to-night?" when she looked at him, and the assured poise of his careless attitude, his look of freshness and strength, the determined forcefulness of his vivid egoism, determined her not to say it. He might not understand, but if he did it would displease him not the less.

Orville, however, had noticed something in her face or manner, and he said:

"What's the matter, Claire — anything wrong?"

"No, except that I saw such a terrible play this afternoon. It rather tired me."

"What on earth do you go to such things for?"

"It was very absorbing — too absorbing. I think perhaps I won't go out to-night, Dudley."

"Oh, come — a little gayety will do you good!" He jumped up, and grasping her by either shoulder, he drew her to him.

"But, Dudley, really I'd rather not."

"Are n't you well?"

"Yes, but —"

"Nonsense, it'll do you good."

Jamie called from below, "It's nearly seven"; and overpowering her disinclination by the force of his determined personality, they descended to the motor, and speeding through the purple dusk which night was pouring into the Avenue between its tall buildings, stopped for Helena.

Claire had spent so many of these evenings since her marriage that she knew exactly the programme which would follow, knew so exactly that she had not even asked Orville where he had got tickets. It was sure to be one of those musical comedies which draw the kind of audience which laughs whether things are funny or not. Claire had at first laughed, too, but it was an effort for her to do so any longer, and she often wondered how Orville could still be attracted by them.

Helena was waiting for them, and presently they found themselves passing through the gilt and marble passages of a neighboring hotel, under a blaze of crystal chandeliers, into a large and sumptuous dining-room, filled with prosperous-looking people in evening dress. A party of eight, four men and four women, seated at a round table, greeted them. They were friends of Orville's — Claire knew them, too. The table was profusely decorated with flowers. The men, gray-haired and hard-featured, with immensely stiff and correct shirt-fronts, collars, and evening clothes, alternated

with the women, who displayed necks and arms be-decked with jewelry.

"Claire, look at Mrs. Pomeroy's pearls," Helena remarked in an undertone.

Dudley heard her, and turned too.

"How much are they worth, Helena?" he asked.

"A hundred thousand, probably."

"Well, Claire, you'd better leave yours off if you expect to be anywhere where Mrs. Pomeroy is. I paid twenty thousand, but compared with hers, they don't look like much."

Dudley really seemed slightly humiliated.

"A hundred thousand!" Jamie exclaimed — "what a waste of money — what could n't I do with a hundred thousand!" And he clasped his hands and looked at the ceiling with an expression of rapture.

"We're dining with them next week," Claire answered; "do you really want me not to wear them?"

"Certainly," answered Dudley. "If Pomeroy's wife can afford necklaces worth a hundred thousand, I'm not going to let my wife be seen with one worth a fifth of it."

Jamie's eyelids fluttered at the vulgarity of this speech, but Helena exclaimed:

"I'd sell my soul for a necklace worth a hundred thousand dollars, and so would any woman" — she drew a luxurious breath — "especially if it were of pearls. I love them beyond everything."

"How extravagant you are!" Claire cried.

"Ah, but you don't love jewelry as I do. Do you know what Mrs. Pomeroy is? — she's a fool, in every way except one. She does know enough to get all sorts of luxuries out of her husband. She never reads anything, she has n't any children, she lives in a hotel, and spends her whole time in dressmakers' shops, jewelers' shops, or milliners' shops, spending money. She leads what *I* call a perfectly ideal existence. If you knew what even her stockings cost, I am sure you would be staggered."

"Not easily," Dudley answered — "my wife can afford anything Pomeroy's can."

"You almost lead that kind of an existence yourself, my dear," Jamie said teasingly.

"Indeed, I don't! If papa had n't built that enormous house, and then left us with not enough to keep it going! The worst of it is, that nobody will buy it and take it off our hands. Why don't you, Dudley?"

"Very well, I'll take it, for the price of a necklace like Mrs. Pomeroy's!"

"But it's worth much more than that. Oh, Claire, I'd hate to be in Dudley's clutches. I'm sure he drives unmercifully hard bargains."

Orville laughed, and Jamie observed:

"They say that it is an economic fact that the more the rich spend on luxuries, the less the poor have to spend on the necessities of life."

"Is that true, Jamie?" Claire asked, arrested by this

statement, and suddenly she saw Falder in his cell, beating against its iron door.

"I don't know; ask Mallette. He can tell you."

"I've told you that there's a dead-line between my house and people like your friend Mallette" — this from Orville.

"But I've already asked him to call, Dudley" — Claire was glad of the opportunity to tell him — "he always used to —"

"Then you can countermand the invitation."

"Why, Dudley, that's absurd!" Helena broke in — "Claire can't do that."

They finished dinner, and went on to the theater, where they were lucky enough to find a play so genuinely amusing that Claire forgot her depression. Orville thereupon insisted on supper at a cabaret. Helena and Jamie were eager to go, Claire acquiesced passively, and getting into the motor they drove a hundred steps and entered the cabaret. A number of Dudley's hard-featured friends greeted them from various parts of the room where crowded parties around overcrowded tables indicated that they were engaged in their usual nightly occupation of spending money. Couples were revolving in an open space in the center of the room which was surrounded by tables, to the energetic time of an orchestra. The vivacity of the actors in the play, and the rapid succession of amusing situations, which had acted as a stimulant, now had its reaction.

Claire danced with Dudley, and as the orchestra stopped, a band of negroes close by started with a crash, with banjos and percussional instruments, a violent, barbaric, syncopated clamor, which served at once to arouse in the dancers a species of excitement of which the orchestra was incapable. Dudley seized Helena's hand, drew her from the table, and they were lost in the whirlpool circling before Claire.

"Want to dance?" Jamie asked.

"No, thanks."

A leg in a covering of diaphanous silk flashed past her, and Helena whirled by in Dudley's arms. Her face was flushed, and her humid eyes looked at him with an expression which seemed to say—"If you want me, take me!" Some similar thought must have struck Jamie, too, for he remarked, "Funny Helena never married"; and from being his waggish self, he became suddenly quiet.

The negroes stopped with a crash, and immediately the orchestra at the other end of the room struck up again. Helena and Dudley returned to the table. Perhaps Dudley, too, had seen that look, for the consciousness that had previously existed between himself and Helena seemed suddenly to have increased in sensitiveness and force. They were more vividly aware of each other than they had been before. Claire, all woman, was aware of this too; but she did n't care; she was tired and sleepy, let down, and wished she were in bed.

"Come, Dudley, let's go," she said.

Dudley and Helena danced into the outer corridor. They moved toward the entrance, put on their wraps, and going out, stood waiting on the edge of two torrents of humanity, for the motor which was slowly making its way toward them. They went on to Helena's, and retracing their way down the deserted Avenue, turned into Ninth Street. The door of the motor slammed hollowly after them, and they entered the dimly lighted hall. Jamie, preceding them, had disappeared upstairs with a parting "good-night."

"You look tired, Claire."

"I am, awfully," Claire answered, as she began to mount the stairs slowly; "I think I won't get up for breakfast."

Dudley, after a moment's hesitation, said:

"About this man Mallette. You say you asked him to call?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't want him here."

"But, Dudley, I can't do that. I can't write and tell him not to come, after having asked him. He may not come at all — probably he won't."

"If he does, you can say that you are out."

"But, Dudley, he knows that I am at home on Fridays" — Claire's voice was growing tremulous with nervousness and fatigue — "I shall certainly not ask him again."

Dudley hesitated once more, finally said, "Well,

good-night"; and as they reached the second floor, turned toward his study.

"Are n't you going to bed too?" she asked; "it's so late."

"As soon as I've had a night-cap," he answered, and turned into the passage without speaking further, or looking at her.

She was aware of that feeling of antagonism which for months past had been rising between them. She knew that each felt it, and that neither could control it, and an intuitive knowledge that this mutual feeling was freighted with ominous significance for the future chilled her, and made her unhappy. Things seemed not going well between them. Something in their natures which they could not control, seemed to be separating them, in sympathy and understanding, slowly, and yet implacably.

She dragged herself up another flight, closed her door, and sank into the low chair which stood before one of the windows. The room was faintly illuminated by a reading-lamp which stood by her bed. She was very tired. A confused phantasmagoria of recent impressions crowded her brain — sad, sordid, or sinister — the tragic scenes of Galsworthy's play, the violent concussions of the barbaric negro music, and Helena's flushed face seeming to say, "If you want me, take me"; and all at once a flood of tears blinded her. She surrendered herself, she could have hardly told why, to an abandonment of weeping, bitter and sad tears, turning her body

so that she could lay her face in her arms, which rested on the low back of her chair.

A sound from somewhere beyond the open window caused her to look up, hastily drying her eyes. The city was dark and still under a floating powder of golden stars. The tenements rose with an unbroken, somber surface, except where, close to her, one dimly lighted window framed the figure of the little dark creature she had seen that morning, nursing a child. A shabby and wretched picture, superimposed upon the mixed impressions of the extravagant backgrounds, of restaurant, theater, and cabaret, which the evening had provided. The attitude of her wretched figure gave unmistakably an impression of dejection and weariness, and yet of surprised and interested observation, and as Claire turned her head, her voice, with an intonation sad and foreign, came clearly to her across the space which separated them.

"Are *you* unhappy?" it said, as if this seemed hardly possible. "I, too, ah, yes, I am unhappy, too — I, too, am unhappy."

A voice sounded gruffly from within; the light was extinguished. Claire stood for a moment, moved by the sad and hopeless accents of that brief confession, and then closing her blinds, prepared at last for the night. She undressed, switched off the light, opened the slats of the blinds, and in the soft gloom which enveloped her surrendered herself, with an immense fatigue, in the soft support of her bed, lying relaxed and

motionless, to the scented security which wrapped her in.

Even in the darkness she was aware of the silken draperies at her windows, and the soft folds of *point d'esprit* which swept from under them over the glass, held back by their satin bows; she was aware of the thick carpet, soft as moss, stretching its velvet surface below her, of the cushions of scented down, on the French armchairs, the gold and silver brushes of her toilet table, the scent bottles of engraved crystal, her jewels hidden in their secret safe. Slumbering in perfumed folds tissues of silk and lace lay in the sliding trays of the cupboards, and in the spaces beyond, in closets as large as rooms, her gowns of silk, satin, velvet, and lace hung, or were folded in wrappings of tissue paper. And beyond, at a distance no greater than from her room to Dudley's the unimaginable squalor of the tenements, beyond them the city's encircling zones of want, beyond them all the world-wide needs left in the wake of war.

She lay sunk in her luxurious bed, surrounded by, closed in by, strata of finery, rank upon rank of boots and slippers standing on their narrow shelves, cloth of silver, cloth of gold, kid, satin, polished leather; rows of hats, rows of sunshades, wraps of fur and velvet, boxes of gloves fresh and unopened, a variety of costly absurdities bought in mere wantonness; in the midst of all these treasures wrung, it seemed, by the abnormal opportunities of war from the miseries of others, a sud-

den terrible distaste arose in her and, oppressed by the stifling canopy of her bed, she sprang up, and leaning on the sill of a window, drew a deep inspiration of the cooler air faintly stirring without.

But she had wanted this. Brought face to face with a future that lacked any guarantees of security, she had traded herself for this very security which was becoming irksome to her. But was that, after all, true? Had she not loved Orville? Did she not love him now? True, she had been glad that he was so stout a staff to lean on, but she had not questioned her assumption that she loved him. But if that were so, why question it now? Because then she did not know what love was. Did she know now? She only knew that she could tell what love was not. And it was not love she had felt for him! Alas, she knew now that it was not! Poor Dudley! But she had made a bargain, and she would stick to it.

"I, too, am unhappy." The foreign accent still sounded in her ears. That little wretched creature — yes — but, after all, why should *she* be unhappy — she herself? Did she ask too much of life? What was there that life did not give her which she had a right to demand of it? Had she not everything? But perhaps to have everything was to have too much — or not enough! And *had* she everything? Most people would have answered that question unhesitatingly in the affirmative, because the mere process of living under luxurious conditions would have sufficed them. But she had begun to know that all these things did not fill a

need her heart hungered for. What *was* this thing? Was it those humanitarian instincts she had begun to awaken to? No, she was not unselfish enough for that. Something seemed to stand before her, amorphous, yet bright, glowing with a delicious promise, and yet fraught perhaps with pain. She longed to look toward it, yet dared not. She felt that with a little effort she would be able to read the secret of her discontent — and yet, she was afraid. She was afraid, and yet her unhappiness had passed. The amorphous and yet bright presence warmed her with a promise which was sweet to her, and yet which she could not or feared to — understand.

CHAPTER XVIII

DUDLEY did not refer to Mallette again, nor, of course, did Claire, and the next Friday he called. The night before Claire and Orville had dined with the lady of the necklace. Orville was late in reaching Ninth Street that afternoon, and as Claire was seated before her dressing-table, he knocked, and came into the room. He carried a small, oblong package, which he laid down before her.

"A little present for you to wear to-night," he said. "I'm awfully behind time. You can tell me how you like it later."

Claire finished dressing before she opened it. She thought, as she unfastened the cord, that he had picked up some trinket, as he was always doing — a paper-knife, a tiny clock, a cigarette case — always very costly; but now the unmistakable morocco box of a jeweller displayed itself as she unfolded the paper wrapping, and opening it, she was transfixed by the subtle beauty of a superb pearl necklace, lying upon its silken couch. She lifted it up. Its warm, heavy richness reminded her of some beautiful but inert organism. She raised her bare arms, and, pressing the emerald clasp together behind her neck, let it rest on her bosom. It hung almost to her waist. It seemed to caress her, to press its satiny surfaces against her skin. Ah! How beautiful! She turned quickly, opened her door, went to

Dudley's room, knocked, and turned the knob. He had been standing before his mirror, in a white waist-coat, but without his coat, tying his cravat, but he had turned, and as she entered, he was waiting for her, looking at her with a curious attitude of expectancy, the significance of which she did not understand until afterwards.

She went up to him and kissed him.

"Ah, Dudley! It is so beautiful! But you must n't — you really must n't — give me such beautiful things. See how lovely it is! You're too, too good to me, Dudley."

"That's all right. Why should n't I be good to you? Do you know how much I made to-day? I closed a deal I've been working on. That's why I was late, and I promised myself, if it went through, I would get you a necklace that would take the shine off Mrs. Pomeroy's. Well, I made a million this afternoon. Besides" — and he stepped back to look at her — "you are such a beauty. Claire, you ought to have such things. There is n't a woman in town who can hold a candle to you."


At Mrs. Pomeroy's, whose suite in its arid elegance reminded Claire of Dudley's bachelor establishment, the necklace served admirably as a topic by which the party was carried beyond the preliminary shoals of conversation. Not only the women, but the men, noticed it immediately, and all, Claire knew, had immediately appraised it as expertly as any jeweler. Orville was congratulated, inferentially, for his ability to buy such

trinkets, and Claire for having a husband with the disposition to do so. Mrs. Pomeroy, alone, was rendered slightly distraite, and it struck Claire that it was rather ungracious so to take the wind out of her sails, at her own dinner party. She had thought of this before leaving the house, but felt that to raise such a point then would be but a poor return for Dudley's generosity.

Claire had been to many of these entertainments. Orville and his intimates were American types of a predatory, rapacious class found in all countries. Each had risen from nothing by shrewdness and energy into a position where wealth was easily made. They were experts in the manipulation of money, the organization of industrial combinations, the promotion of new enterprises, and the art of making something — a great deal in fact — out of nothing. They were gamblers, acquiring wealth through the fictitious fluctuations of securities, the thimble-riggers of a country fair, magnified a thousand fold; modern buccaneers sailing the seas of commerce. The war had meant little to them except additional opportunities of which all had taken full advantage. They accumulated little, although they made so much, because they spent so enormously. They gave no heed to the future; they had a hundred irons in a hundred fires. They were the real coiners, and they used this flux of gold for the purchase of all the things the world had to offer. Money was made, not to conserve, but to spend, and the pleasure they derived from it was not in its accumulation, but in the variety of

means by which they could get rid of it. They knew how to make money, no small thing, but they knew little else, and that, too, they knew, and that was no small thing. They decked their wives out in Paris gowns, loaded them with jewelry, were without any, beyond a surface knowledge, of the real amenities of life, and while one or two of the more imaginative among them kept mistresses, most of them were fairly well behaved, although they usually began to drink at the close of business, each having forestalled the law by storing up huge quantities of alcoholic beverages, and had become rather tipsy by bedtime. They were plain, hard-featured, and were dull company. Their wives possessed similar characteristics.

Dinner was served in Mrs. Pomeroy's private dining-room, with a wealth of detail and an extravagance of service money can buy wherever it is to be purchased. Conversation during its progress consisted of a constant cross-fire of good-natured chaff, rather heavy-handed, accompanied by much boisterous laughter. At the conclusion of dinner the ladies withdrew to an adjoining parlor. The newest types of motors were discussed, clothes, jewelry, and the latest gossip. From the dining-room came fragments of financial discussions, or occasional lapses into undertones, followed by loud bursts of laughter, which indicated that a dubious story was being told. These two topics, stocks, and indecent stories, engaged the men for twenty minutes, when they would emerge, and all would seat themselves for an



evening of auction, at which husbands and wives were kept carefully apart.

And in this company of middle-aged and uncultured people, given over to the pursuit and enjoyment of material things, Claire shone like a standard rose blooming among a brown and withered leafage.

Claire dreaded these evenings, and came away from them with a sense of mental and spiritual prostration which she smilingly concealed from Orville, even during dissertations on his part, afterward, on the principles of good auction, which she could not understand. For Claire had no card sense, and was a wretched player, while Dudley was a brilliant one.


It was after a night of this description that Mallette called. Before many months summer would be upon them, and Orville was talking of renting a country house. Adelaide had shut hers very early, and had gone to a distant hotel, and Helena, who did not wish yet to leave town, had come to Ninth Street, on Claire's invitation, to stop a week.

Claire had wondered whether, if she had the opportunity, it might not be best to send word that she was not at home if Mallette should call, but, as it happened, she was given no choice in the matter, because he was shown into the drawing-room while Claire was there with another visitor. It was quite late, and he was hardly seated when Jamie arrived. Helena, who had been out somewhere, came in soon after, and, before

Claire realized the time, the clock struck seven, and Dudley himself appeared in the room.

To Claire's surprise Dudley greeted Mallette with a cordiality he did not always feel himself obliged to show toward guests, and pressed him to dine with them. Jamie, as Orville had led the way, added his persuasions, until Mallette accepted. Jamie took him to his room, and the others separated, to meet in the drawing-room in a quarter of an hour.

Claire speculated as to Dudley's unexpected friendliness, and concluded that he was simply making use of an opportunity which had been offered to find out for himself what manner of man Mallette was. During dinner a desultory chatter was kept up, but afterwards, in the drawing-room, Dudley, Claire noticed, led the conversation to subjects he had never shown, so far as she knew, an interest in before. All those questions which after-war conditions had made more vital — socialism, labor, wealth and poverty. Claire knew that Mallette's presence accounted for this interest, and that Dudley must have been informed by some one of Mallette's opinions, and for some reason she assumed that Helena had told him. Dudley, with that persistent good-nature of his, which nevertheless seemed always to hide a current of dangerous determination, tried suavely to draw Mallette out; but he was difficult to draw. He knew, of course, that his ideas would be received with scant sympathy, and seemed, while not afraid to try conclusions, not eager to begin an argument.



But Dudley was persistent, pressing him with questions asked with an affability which hid in it something of contempt, until Mallette finally took up his challenge.


When his determination became apparent, a feeling of apprehension seized Claire. She feared that he was about to reveal himself as a vague dreamer, and that under the cross-questioning of Dudley's experienced worldliness, he would expound only a practicable sentimentalism, impossible of application to social problems, which had and always would exist, as they existed at present. Claire, through tradition, inherited inclinations, hearsay, and fragmentary knowledge of the most superficial character, had always visualized, in hearing the words socialist, reformer, a worthless creature, unhealthy-looking and sallow, with long, greasy locks, who, too lazy to work, went about the world with a head stuffed with ridiculous theories, trying to make other people discontented.

They were sitting in the drawing-room, now wider and more sumptuous than of old. A shaded lamp burned on a table, and one electric light surmounting its make-believe candle, and hidden under a small canopy of silk, shed a mellow light on the keyboard of the piano toward which Helena, when it had become evident that a discussion was inevitable, had beckoned Jamie with a slight grimace.

The shaded table-lamp lit with its steady radiance the fluted outlines of a silver coffee-pot which stood

upon a silver tray and the porcelain surfaces of little cups. Near these sat Orville and Mallette, Orville with a cigar, and at one side, and a little more in shadow, Claire; and it seemed to her, as she sat relaxed and yet listening, that this conversation would bear within it a momentous significance strangely disproportioned to the surroundings, enveloped as she was in the warm and secure embrace of the luxurious atmosphere of the room, compounded of the golden glow of the lamps, the scent of flowers, and the perfume of Orville's incomparable cigar.

Dudley had stirred Mallette into argument by deriding socialism as an irresponsible movement which would overthrow the existing structure, without knowing how to build anything to take its place, and to his surprise Mallette agreed with him. To Mallette the capitalistic system was necessary, and had much of good in it. He did not regard the capitalist as an inhuman monster, but as representing a class slow to change, and understandably so. What he advocated was simply a better relationship between capital and labor, by which poverty might be done away with. Even his plea for this was based, not on an appeal to humanitarian motives, but to business logic, and he began to give, with a precision which indicated great familiarity with his subject and a retentive memory, a mass of data, showing how senseless the irreconcilable antagonisms of labor and capital were, as shown by the staggering costs, not only to the community at large, but to themselves, of their



endless disputes, strikes, oppressions, and broken agreements.

Dudley caught at the last two words. "How can you deal with labor? It has great power, and no responsibility. The history of labor unions is a history of broken promises."

Again Mallette amazed, and rather annoyed, Dudley by agreeing with him. He, too, did not believe much in trade unions. At the best they were a necessary evil. It was true that they had improved the condition of labor, but only slightly, and they were largely responsible for the present inflation because, if wages were raised, nothing could prevent capital from raising prices which would be paid by the consumer, and so in part at least by labor itself. The capitalist himself could not be reached.

"If you can't reach the capitalist, what are you going to do about it?" Dudley asked.

"The capitalist cannot be reached under the present system. But let me say again that I do not regard the capitalist, as he is always represented in labor papers, as a malign creature, bent on sucking the blood of the proletariat to the last drop."

Many were rapacious, he went on to say, but many were strong, conservative men, conscientious, but with an abiding and unshakable faith in the sacred rights of private property, and while they were the driving force behind the industrial machine, and while any system, Mallette believed, would prove a failure which deprived them of their just rewards, still, they had, it must be

admitted, the defects of their qualities, and their principal defect was their inability to believe that labor had any share in the wealth produced by labor.

“The immense amount of money lost each year, both to employer and employed, in strikes,” Mallette continued, “could be saved by certain general regulations, and by certain concessions, on the part of capital; but capital will not make those concessions because it feels that it would be sacrificing a principle, yielding an inalienable right. So it goes on. Labor says, ‘All wealth is the product of my hands; but as soon as it comes into being it is taken away from me.’ The capitalist says, ‘Wealth is the product of my brains and industry. Each man has his chance. The meanest hod-carrier, if he has the ability, will accumulate wealth too. Take mine from me if you can! My brains and money, and your labor, are each a commodity having a certain value in the markets of the world, and your commodity is n’t worth as much as mine. We are each free men. You sell what you have for what you can get for it. So do I.’

“But the wage-earner, if he must sell his labor for a price which will not give him some little share in the comforts and pleasures of life, is not a free man. If he must sell his labor at a price which condemns him to an existence, precarious at that, of undernourishment, of scrofulous children, lack of warmth, lack of all the things which a measure of industrial security would give him, he is a slave. And this slavery can be remedied.”

“How?” asked Orville.



"By coöperation between labor and capital, by which labor is given a share — a very small share would suffice — and by the regulation of production."

"Production regulates itself." Dudley interrupted.

Mallette looked at him as if he could not believe that he was serious, and Orville added hastily, "But how is production to be regulated — by the State?"

"By private bargaining."

"You'll never get capital to listen to any such ideas."

"Yes, capital ultimately will listen," Mallette replied, with calm conviction, "because by slow degrees society is reconstructing itself on principles of humanity and altruism. What has caused the development and growth of labor unions? — industrial discontent. What has caused this industrial discontent? Exorbitant dreams and demands on the part of labor? Not at all; simply stark poverty. Labor is easily contented. It is not stirred by restless ambitions. There are industrial communities where it has never organized, simply because in those communities its employers have broken down that antagonism which has grown up between capital and labor, by treating their employees like individual human beings. The war has brought home the necessity of this so clearly. It seems so clear to me that the one supreme need of mankind is political and industrial emancipation. But man collectively seems to be unable to progress one step forward without taking from man the utmost toll of sweat and torment. How dull, how senseless, in view of what we have gone through in the

last six years, from any point of view is the old imperialism of governments and the old industrial warfare! The strike has been compared by one of your writers on economics to two men standing side by side, and settling a dispute by throwing gold pieces into the sea, the longest purse to win. From a simple computation of relative cost of coöperation or contest based on experience, we would think that satisfactory solutions could be reached; and if more is needed, if you wish to appeal to his humanitarian instincts, take your obdurate employer through this city, beyond the narrow, central strip where he and his class live, into the outer slums which hem him in" — here Mallette began to tell the tale of the poor which is told so often, which so few listen to. He told it without any touch of sentimentality, by cold facts fortified by figures; and as Claire listened, stirred and distressed by his vivid pictures, she longed to take him to her room and, showing him the tenements, say to him, "Is it true that such things need not be? — that there is a cure for all this?" — while at the same time she doubted, conscious of a surge of pity, not for that outcast army whose cause Mallette was pleading, but for Mallette himself, fighting, she believed, a hopeless battle against a giant enemy as strong as humanity itself.

But Dudley, with his individualistic ego working over-time, without any collective consciousness whatever, listened to him with impatience, contempt, and almost hostility, partly, perhaps, because he knew that

he was no match for him in the subject under discussion. Helena and Jamie, too, had come to listen, and Mallette, absorbed in his topic, far exceeded his intentions, until jumping up in confusion he offered his hand to Claire.

"It is a curious thing," he said, "that while what I have been telling you are indisputable facts, they are so unpopular with people that when I do speak of them I feel like apologizing for them. I am sure you have been very good to listen to me and, somehow, I have said much more than I intended to."

"Most people don't understand," Claire said. "Poverty seems so remote that it does n't seem real. Then, too, so many people think that it is only comparative, and that the poor don't mind, because they are used to slums and privations. I am glad that when you showed us what it really was, you gave us hope that it might be done away with. It is all wonderfully interesting."

Orville, who, ignoring the fact that Mallette was saying good-bye, had turned his back and was filling his coffee-cup, here faced about.

"An interesting pipe dream! Social and political reformers have been at work ever since there's been such a thing as organized society, and they've never accomplished that!" And he snapped his fingers.

"I am not expecting change except where interest dictates it. It seems to me that one may not unreasonably expect it then. Here is an instance I personally know about, which occurred at home. A certain works there would have made, during a period of five years, as

nearly as can be calculated, five million dollars, had not disputes with labor during this time reduced their profits by two millions. If half of that sum had been paid to their hands during that five years, they would have been contented, better fed, more efficient, and the concern itself would have saved the other million. Is there anything fantastic in the contention that the wise and prudent thing would have been, for this concern, to make four millions instead of three, and have their workers contented in the bargain?"

"Fantastic! If you want to know whether it is fantastic or not, come to me and try to tell me how to run my business."

"I don't see that that is answering my question." Orville's manner was plainly offensive, but Mallette seemed determined to hold him to the point.

"You don't think so? Well, the workers in that case were trying to dictate to their employers. I would have done exactly as their employers did."

"But the head of those works had an opportunity to relieve almost intolerable conditions among his employees, and put a million dollars into his own pockets besides."

"I tell you it's a matter of principle."

"A matter of principle to make other people suffer at unnecessary cost to yourself?"

"Yes," cried Dudley, completely losing his temper; "to hell with them, and to hell with the whole bunch of sentimentalists, loafers, and agitators, who go about

the world trying to make trouble, and who are n't worth the powder to blow them to blazes."

Mallette shrugged his shoulders and turned away from him. "Discussions of this kind are rarely profitable," he said. "Good-night, Mrs. Orville, good-night, Miss Hampton, good-night." This last was addressed to Dudley, who ignored it, and Mallette left the room, followed by Jamie.

"Dudley!" cried Claire, with a blaze of anger — "how outrageous of you! You deliberately insulted him."

"That is precisely what I did. That makes the second time in this house. Perhaps now he'll stay away."

"He shall not stay away if I can persuade him to come here."

"What's that?" Dudley cried sharply.

"The least I can do for your sake is to ignore your rudeness."

"Never mind about my rudeness. When I am rude it is because I want to be, and I give you fair warning that I don't intend that he shall come here again."


"You shall *not* be insulting in your own house, to people I have asked here" — Claire stamped her foot — "and I intend to ask whom I please. I am perfectly able to judge about such things."

"Try it," Dudley cried threateningly.

"I thought I was to be free —"

"You are, as long —"

"As long as I do what you want me to do."



"Look here," Dudley cried, turning to Helena, who sat with the non-committal smile of one who is caught unwillingly in the meshes of a family dispute, "am I unreasonable?"

"Really, Claire, he is n't worth bothering about."

"It is n't a question of bothering or not bothering. I won't have Dudley rude to people in my house."

"If you don't want me to be rude to people I object to, don't ask them here."

"Being rude to them won't stop me, Dudley."

"It will stop them from coming."

"Have I ever asked any one else you did n't approve of?"

"No; but one is one too many."

"Very well, Dudley, you shall see whether you can tyrannize over me or not," Claire answered with finality, and she went out.

Claire climbed to her room, and shut and locked her door. This was not the first time that she and Dudley had engaged in open conflict. That they had not done so from the beginning was because Claire had submitted resolutely to him at first, in order to avoid what had just occurred, but she had soon understood that, to retain her self-respect, she must abandon such a course, and she had made an issue of the first incident which would serve her purpose. Dudley expected absolute submission from her so much as a matter of course, that he had taken it for granted from the first, in spite of his assurances to the contrary. He delighted in spending money

on her, loading her with presents of Paris gowns, jewelry, motors, and furs, as a man may lavish money on a prostitute who has enslaved him by the appeal of her physical fascinations, but it had never occurred to him that occasions might arise where she might wish, and have the right, to make decisions in opposition to his own.

Claire knew when she had decided on this course that it would be a difficult one to follow because she had become well aware of the absolute inflexibility of Dudley's nature. She doubted if he would ever yield an inch on any point whatever. But she had decided that she would not yield either. She must either submit to be Dudley's slave, or prepare herself for a struggle the end of which she could not see; and in this struggle she had hoped for one thing, that it might be carried on with calmness on both sides, and not degenerate into the undignified quarrels she had witnessed occasionally among his married friends.

Claire thought of these things as she stood by her window. Of Dudley's displeasure at her first assertion of independence, their recurring disagreements, and their periods of harmony which failed to conceal the increasing antagonism which was growing up between them; but to-night to her surprise she was not unhappy. She felt curiously calm and resolute. The conditions of her married life had for months weighed heavily on her spirit, but to-night all that had passed.

She seated herself in her darkened room, a little to one side, so that she could look diagonally up at the evening

sky which glowed faintly between the somber profiles of the surrounding roofs; and under that sky the teeming earth, with its incalculable variety of act and incident, of endeavor and accomplishment, was seething around her; and from that world she would not be shut away. She, too, would play her part in it, in that glittering and fascinating fabrication whose changing surfaces were shot through with the flashing colors of genius, romance, heroism, sacrifice, and love.

And love — that luminous something, pale, amorphous, which had exalted her spirit once before — had returned again, brighter, warmer, more irresistible. She lifted her face. It seemed to descend from the stars, to rain down on her, a soft and golden flood. Like Dansë, she surrendered herself to it, and with this surrender a supreme felicity enveloped her, a supreme gift seemed to have been poured into her soul.

Love — ah! and she smiled, hiding her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XIX

DINNER had been announced, and Claire, a little late, was making haste on the last details of her toilet. Her door stood open. She could hear Jamie's step on the floor of his room, and the air he was whistling resounded through the spaces of the house. His step sounded on the stair, and as he passed her door — he rarely stopped there now — she called to him with their old call.

"Yes," he answered, and came in. "Where's Dudley?"

"Gone to the country to look at a house, Jamie."

"Will Helena be in for dinner?"

"She has gone, too."

"Where?"

"With Dudley."

"Oh!" And he added presently, "I don't see why Helena should be looking at a country house with Dudley. It is n't any affair of hers."

"But I could n't go, Jamie. Dudley did n't say anything about it until the last moment, and I had an engagement. You know how he hates to do anything alone."

"I say, let's dine somewhere. The Brevoort's just around the corner."

"It's too late, Jamie, dinner is ready now. We might

go afterward for a little while, and have our coffee there."

"Right-o," Jamie answered, and they went downstairs arm in arm. They had not been alone together for so long that Claire could hardly remember. Jamie was thinking the same thing.

"This is like old times," he said; and added guardedly, "You know this cook —"

"Well, what, Jamie?"

"Puts too much cream in everything."

Claire laughed. It did seem like old times. "Some chefs always do that."

"Well, there's nothing like good old-fashioned home cooking. So Dudley's gone to look for a house!"


"Yes, it will soon be getting too warm in town."

Summer in truth was coming, but Claire had hardly noticed. Something had come into her life at last, which filled it completely. She had not seen Felix since the night Dudley had lost his temper, or pretended to, and while she both longed and feared to, immersed in her secret dreams, she waited.

Jamie said: "I say, Claire, Helena never used to bother about us, unless she wanted something — what's the explanation? Is it because you've got so much more money than you used to have?"

"I don't know, Jamie; it's just happened, I suppose."

"Just happened!" Jamie repeated scornfully. "Don't you believe that things just happen with Helena — I know better than that!"



"Well, I don't care, Jamie, one way or the other."

"I don't either," Jamie answered, "only I would just like to let her know that I see through her. It's awfully convenient to have a house like yours to stop at in New York, when she happens to want to."

It had become customary for Helena to stop there. Adelaide had gone to her distant hotel to economize, and Helena found Ninth Street a convenient resting-place between various visits. Dudley liked to have her there, and for that reason Claire liked it too.

"Well, let's go now," Jamie said. They rose from the table, and descending, walked slowly toward the Avenue. To Claire the mildness of the day recalled so much of those parts of her life in which Jamie had had a share. Always, it seemed to her, spring and summer had found them closer together, sauntering together under the early leafage, in the warm relaxation of tepid and balmy breezes, under the amber translucence of late afternoon, or the shadowy dusk of evening. She slid an arm through one of his.

"Ah, how nice it is, Jamie!" But she knew that the exultation which lifted her spirit higher than any influence of past impressions could have done, was because she was about to see Felix.

They crossed the Avenue. The strains of an orchestra escaped with a blaze of light from the open windows of the upper restaurant.

"Let's go downstairs, Jamie; it's quieter."

They went into one of the lower rooms, and as Claire

had known he would be, Felix was there. He was reading a letter. The room was almost empty. Jamie cried, "Hello, there's Mallette," and hurried over to him. Claire followed. Felix was holding a letter in his hand, and as he rose, his eyes caught hers, and it seemed to her that she could not look away from him, and that her own were saying to him, so that he could not fail to understand, "I am here because I love you."

"We've come in for our coffee," said Jamie; "I see you're having yours. Let's have ours here, too, Claire — that is, unless you want to finish your letter."

"Please do," Felix answered; "as for my letter, I know it by heart. It's from my father. I'm going home."

It seemed to Claire that she could not speak. Something which fluttered in her bosom for a moment choked her. All her exultation of spirit dropped away. She heard Jamie say, "On your own terms, I hope," and fought desperately to master herself.

"Yes, our rivals have been trying some experiments in coöperation with such success that it has become necessary for us to do something too."

"How glad you must be to go!" Claire murmured; and this time, as he looked at her she strove to return his look, as if by doing so she were saying, "I am brave and indifferent. What I said to you was not true. Go, it does n't matter. I am very strong" — but she was not strong enough, and her eyes fell before his. For a moment Felix paused —

"No, I am not glad. At one time I might have been, but I am not now. Still, I must go. It is better that I should."

Again Claire's spirit fluttered upwards. Did he know? And did his answer, too, imply a confession? She longed to say, "But if you do not want to go, stay." Jamie would not understand, but she dared not. Indeed she must not, say it.

"But, Mallette," Jamie exclaimed, "it's so romantic! It's like something out of a book. But the trouble is, we shall never see you again."

Yes, that was the trouble. She would never see him again. That would be the end. She felt that she must be alone with him, if even for a moment, for five minutes, really alone together, as they had not been for so long. She must manage this to-night if she could. It might be her last chance. In some way she must think of what to do.

"But you would be coming to England, no doubt," Felix said. "It would never do for us to let so small a thing as distance destroy an old friendship like ours."

And while he addressed himself to Jamie, Claire knew that he spoke to her, and she feared that what he meant was, that in distance and time lay their only hope; and in his tone, the expression of his eyes, there was a finality which she rebelled against. She would not have it so. She must think of something, so that fate might not bind and separate them. If she could manage to be with him with no barrier between them,

something might come of it, some method of solution at present unknown to her.

"By the way," she heard Jamie say, "my waltz is out. I bought a copy of it at a music store this afternoon. I meant to show it to you, Claire!"

Claire saw instantly that fate, relenting, was giving her her chance.

"Why Jamie, how thrilling! Where is it?"

"At the house."

"But I must see it — I can't wait. Run and get it, do. It's only a step."

"Shall I?" Jamie wavered, and then with the light of parental pride shining in his eye, rose and seized his hat.

"All right; I'll be back in a second."

But when they were alone, she could not speak. The electric lights burned too intensely. The room was empty except for a waiter, who stood looking at them. She saw a strip of paper lying beside Jamie's plate, and beckoning him, she paid the bill. The blaze of light which filled the room seemed to lay bare her soul.

"It is stifling!" And she got up, saying to the waiter, "When the gentleman who was here just now comes back, tell him that we are walking to the Square. It is so warm here."

The Square teemed with life, under the pale transparencies of leaves made luminous by the electric lights, but near the outer edge they found an empty bench submerged in the shadows of a denser foliage, and as they sat down, Felix spoke.

"Ah," he said, "why — why did you?"

"I did n't know," she answered. "I never knew until — until — And I was so alone, and so afraid — and you were not here. If you had been here I would have known."

"But to know now, when it is too late —"

"Ah, Felix, why did n't you tell me before you went away?"

"How could I? I had nothing — nothing to offer you. And now it is too late."

"No, no, it is sweet to know, even now."

"But I must go. I must not stay."

"Yes, you must go, but now that we know, don't you see that time and distance won't so much matter? I will have my secret, and you yours. But if you had gone without our knowing —!"

"And can you be content, Claire — what a beautiful name — and how beautiful you are — can you be content with that?"

"No, I shall not be content, but it will be very sweet, Felix, cherishing my secret love. Because, no matter where I am, I shall be with you. At night, in my dreams, I shall be with you. When I am with other people, doing the daily things of daily life, I shall be with you always."

"And you will be content with that?"

"No, I said that I would not be content, but it will keep me from being too unhappy — and, Felix, you must not be unhappy either, because something — since I have been sitting here — something tells me that

this is not the end for us — that it is only the beginning. Go and work to do what you had hoped to do in London. And I must work, too — unless somehow I find work to do, I — I—”

“Ah, my darling, don’t, don’t —”

In the shadow she turned on him the misty starlight of her eyes, and suddenly, oblivious for a moment of the material world, their lips met, and they drew together in a passionate embrace. For a moment she rested in his arms, a delicious burden; she seemed to droop, to relax, her head dropped for a moment to his shoulder, and he smelt the fragrance of her hair. A sigh passed her lips. Her tears stopped. A sudden exhaustion seemed to have weakened her limbs, but she disengaged herself, and lifting her head, said again, almost to herself —

“Yes, I must work, too. Ah, Felix, what can I do?”

The hope born of the realization that they loved each other seemed to die down under the growing pressure, the unescapable fact. Felix seemed about to speak, paused, and began —

“I was going to say — but no, I will not.”

Claire put a hand on his — “No, no, Felix — you were going to ask me to come with you, but it would n’t do.”

“Yes, I will say it. Come with me, Claire.”

“It would n’t get us anywhere, Felix. It would n’t solve anything. No, we must wait. Oh, Felix, we must think of what it would have been if you had gone with-

out our knowing. Now, we know. We must n't forget that. And now we must go — Jamie will be looking for us."

"Claire, I can't," Felix cried — "I can't let you go! I will stay here; sometimes, at least, we will be able to see one another."

"It would n't do, dear, really it would n't. It would be worse, much worse, for both of us. You *must* go, Felix. You have your chance now, and you must take it."

Once more he caught her in his arms.

"Please, Felix, we must go. Jamie must be wondering where we are." She tried to rise, but he held her.

"But this is not good-bye, Claire."

She stooped and touched her lips quickly to his. "No," she breathed softly, "I shall see you again. I shall manage, but we must, we really must go." And under the shadow of the trees, with clasped hands, close together, they moved slowly toward the Avenue.

Jamie was nowhere to be seen. They turned back to the Square, sought him there without success, and returned to the restaurant. The waiter said he had not been there, but as they reached the street again they saw him turn the corner of Ninth Street, and cross hurriedly toward them, and it struck Claire, although she immediately, for the moment, forgot it, that he looked agitated, anxious, and preoccupied. He approached them quickly, and said, "Did you think I was never coming? Dudley was there, and — and de-

tained me." He held a white roll under his arm, but seemed to have forgotten about it, until, upon Claire's speaking of it, he unrolled it, and all three looked at it as he held it up so that light from a neighboring street lamp would fall upon its surface. He held it thus for a moment, and then thrust it again under his arm.

Claire said, "How pretty it looks, Jamie" — perfunctorily; but Jamie, in his preoccupation, did not notice hers.

Claire gave her hand to Felix, and as he pressed it she said, "Good-night"; and in spite of Jamie's presence, "I will write you. I will send you word very, very soon."

At the door Jamie, who had not spoken, said, "I'm not coming in just yet, Claire." He held out the sheet of music, — "Would you mind taking it in?"

Claire found Dudley in the drawing room. He was smoking a cigar, and a glass, a siphon, and a decanter of whiskey, stood on the table.

"Where's Helena?" she asked.

"Gone to bed!"

"Did you find something pretty?"

"It was pretty enough, but the house was too small. I don't know whether I shall take one, after all. Do you mind?"

"Not at all, Dudley."

"Well, we'll see." He emptied his glass and rose.

"I think I'll go to bed. Good-night."

He picked up the tray containing the decanter and siphon, and, balancing it before him, carried it upstairs. Claire closed one of the French windows which stood open, turned out the lights, left one burning in the hall, and went to her room. She was filled with mingled feelings of happiness and shame. She wished to be alone, and yet she wished, too, that Dudley might have stayed with her, so that she might, by her kindness to him, by some subtle charm of behavior, make amends to him for the wrong she was doing him. But as she stood in her room, looking straight before her, she was conscious that her happiness was crumbling under the pressure of an accusative discontent which she could not escape.

She went to her desk, and wrote these lines quickly and without hesitation —

Now that I have had a moment to think, I know that we must not see each other again.

She signed it, addressed an envelope to Felix, sealed it, and locked it in her desk.

That was the least she could do, and as she reviewed the past since her marriage, it seemed to her that a revolting egotism had been absorbing her, making her oblivious to her responsibilities to Dudley. She acknowledged to herself, now, that she had married him because she knew that he would make the future safe for her. Besides, for the moment, he had swept her off her feet; but she had never been other than a free agent,

there had not been anything of duress about it; and yet, in spite of the fact that she had made this bargain with less sincerity than had Dudley, she had not had the pluck, had not been sporting enough, to take her medicine without complaining. She had even blamed Dudley, and yet at the first opportunity had forgotten her obligations as his wife. Claire flushed now, miserable, and angry with herself. She had been contemptible but that was past now, and in the future —

Jamie's step sounded stealthily, and yet unsteadily on the stairs, and in a moment he pushed her door open and came in, closing it after him. Claire saw at once, not only that he had been drinking, but that he was suffering from the effects of some shock, or from illness; and yet he seemed to be endeavoring to control a condition of strong agitation or excitement. Claire, alarmed, took a step toward him.

"What is it, Jamie?" — But he interrupted her —

"Claire," he said, in a whisper, "you must get out of here!"

"What do you mean?"

"You can't stay in this house another night!" He began walking unsteadily up and down, a prey to an almost uncontrollable excitement. "Pack a bag now. I'll go with you —"

"But, Jamie, what is it? Tell me!"

"I can't," he answered. Suddenly he raised a fist, and shook it in the direction of Dudley's room. "Damn his soul!" he cried. "Come Claire, we must go!"

"Hush! But, Jamie, listen to me! What is it? What has he done to you?"

"He has n't done anything to me. He's done it to you. He's made it impossible for you to stay here."

"But, Jamie, what — "

"Good God, can't you understand — Helena! When I came for the music — "

Under the shock of this revelation they fell apart in silence, but Jamie seemed to stagger, and in a moment Claire's arms were about him.

"Don't bother, dear, it will be all right, and, Jamie, you've been so good lately."

"I know, Claire — I took one drink — I was so — it made me so — "

"Yes, yes, I know; it's all right."

"But, Claire, you won't stay, you can't stay now!"

"I must think what to do." But to herself she said, "I am no better than he."

"Are you going to let her sleep in this house to-night?" he demanded.

"Jamie, please be quiet, some one will hear you. You *must* let me think! We can't do anything to-night. Listen, Jamie, does Dudley know that — that — "

"I think so. I think he heard me coming downstairs afterwards. He stopped me and asked me where you were and I said I was going to get you at the Brevoort. But if he does n't know now, he will know, because I intend to tell him — the beast — I intend to — "

"Jamie, please."

The door opened, and Dudley came in. He was in his pajamas, which revealed the muscular curve of his chest and the sweep of his powerful thighs. His feet were thrust into a pair of evening pumps.

"What's the matter?" he said, coming in and shutting the door. "Drunk again, are you?"

Jamie swayed again slightly.

"Not drunk exactly, but I've had a drink. I took it after" — Jamie hesitated, to gather courage — "after seeing something that happened in this house this evening."

"And you've been telling Claire, have you?"

"Yes."

Dudley made a quick step toward him, but Claire with one movement stood between them.

"Dudley," she cried, warningly, "be careful! Jamie, go to bed!"

"I'm going to break his damned little sneaking neck!"

"You're not going to touch him! Jamie, go upstairs." And as Jamie, stubborn and belligerent, hesitated, she stamped her foot — "Jamie!" she cried, peremptorily, "go upstairs, do you hear?"

Jamie made for the door, and as he passed Dudley, purposely brushing close to him, he glared at him with an expression of concentrated bravado and defiance. The door shut after him, Dudley broke into a short laugh —

"He's got his nerve with him. The little fool! Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing, Dudley."

"Why?"

"Because this evening, in the Square, sitting under the trees, I told a certain man that I loved him. I was in his arms; I kissed him — If it had been here, in this house, who knows what might have happened?"

Dudley listened as if he could not believe his senses, and noticing his dawning expression of bewilderment, rage, and displeasure, Claire felt a wild desire to laugh, to burst into peal after peal of hysterical laughter at the sordid irony of the situation.

"So, Dudley, what can I do? Nothing, it seems to me."

"Who was it?"

"I shall not tell you."

"You need n't — it was your actor friend. If I find him I'll shoot him."

Jamie must have said something which enabled Dudley to make this conjecture.

"Do you expect me to shoot Helena?" Claire asked.

"It is n't the same thing."

"Why not?"

"Because all men have more than one woman, and I am like the rest. I supposed, of course, you knew and expected it."

"That kind of cynicism is pretty dreadful, Dudley; and, besides, what you say is n't true, and you know it is n't. All men are n't like that, and you know that I did n't expect anything of the kind."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"In the light of what you have just said, I probably *shall* do something now. Will you ask Helena to leave the house?"

"No."

"I mean in the morning."

"She was going, anyway. Look here, Claire, we have n't been getting on well together lately. I'm ready to give you everything you want, but I've got to lead my own life."

"Will you let me take the man I told you about, as my lover?"

"Are you crazy? Go ahead, and I'll divorce you. And another thing; don't think you can hoodwink me, because you can't."

"But I don't understand — you want your freedom, and will not give me mine."

"No!" Dudley thundered; "and if you try to deceive me —"

"I shall not try to deceive you," Claire answered wearily; "let's stop this conversation; it's too beastly. I'm tired; I want to go to bed. I want time to think a little."

But when she was alone, she could not think. She could dream, but she could not think. And she dreamed that she lay once more in Felix's arms. She tried not to, but she could not help it. She unlocked her desk, took out the note she had written to him, tore it up, and after she had destroyed it, wrote it again, and fearing that

her present determination might waver, she put on a hat, and going downstairs she let herself out into the street. It was about eleven o'clock. She went to the corner of Sixth Avenue, and stood struggling with herself for a moment before committing the note to the irrecoverable depths of the letter-box. As she turned to retrace her steps, she saw people running into Eighth Street, a block way. Curiosity, and a spirit of adventure, caused her to follow them. A police wagon and an ambulance stood in front of one of the tenements, and as she joined the crowd three police officers burst out of the doorway, struggling with the swarthy, powerful man who lived with the little foreign creature, opposite Claire's window. Blood was running down his face from an abraded scalp, his clothing was torn and disheveled, and he struggled so desperately that as they reached the pavement the policeman tripped him. One seized his throat and began choking him; another drew his arms back, while the third handcuffed him, and then, angered by his resistance, they lifted him bodily and hurled him into the wagon. His head struck a corner of the bench which ran along each side of the interior of the wagon, and he collapsed limply on the floor. Claire was thrilled and frightened by the savagery and violence of the scene.

Two of the policemen had returned to the tenement, and while she still watched they came out again with the ambulance surgeon. They were carrying a stretcher, and Claire caught a glimpse of a small head, covered

with smooth, blue-black hair. Claire pressed through to the officer who stood beside the police wagon.

"Has he killed her?" she asked breathlessly.

"Not this time," the officer answered, "but he's a bad one. We've had trouble with him before. He'll kill her some day, that's certain, if she goes on living with him."

"But why does she?" Claire asked. "Why does n't she leave him?"

"Well, ma'am, the poor can't do much to help themselves," the policeman answered. He was large, comfortable, and middle-aged. "What could she do? Suppose she took French leave with her baby, where could she go? She could n't hire a flat anywhere, because she has n't the price. If she had, she could n't afford to buy even a bed to sleep on. Everything they've got in the world is in those two rooms!"

"I'll see that she gets the money," Claire exclaimed. "I suppose if I went to the hospital to-morrow, I could see her, if she's well enough?"

"Yes, you could see her. This would be a good chance if you want to do anything for her. He'll get sent up for thirty days at least. Still, it won't be easy. When they get out they always seem to find them again."

Claire, making a mental note of the name of the hospital which was painted on the side of the ambulance, returned to the house, and let herself in. The two rooms of the flat opposite hers were brightly illuminated, and occupied by a number of women. One of them held

a baby, and was endeavoring to quiet it. Others seemed to be making a desultory attempt to tidy up, while others occupied the few rickety chairs the place afforded. The door into the passage beyond stood open, and Claire could see the figures of men moving about, and through this opening children passed in and out. The entire population of the tenement seemed to have been roused, and to have come down to the scene of the drama.

The name of the hospital kept recurring to her. It was unknown to her, and opening her telephone book she found that it was in a strange quarter on the East Side. In the morning she would find it, and it occurred to her suddenly that if she could find work to do in such a place, it would be what she wanted. Work in the nature of an expiation for the dissatisfaction she felt, the distaste for her past and present lethargy. Hard, difficult, and repulsive work, expiatory, and absorbing, too, so that she might forget. That is what she would do, if she could find a way. Absorb herself in work. Ignore the present; let its problems solve themselves if they would, and by efforts more altruistic than she had known before, forget the past.

CHAPTER XX

CLAIRE, the next morning, heard Dudley descend the stairs, then Helena, and just as she had finished dressing, Jamie, who knocked at her door. Jamie was himself again.

"They've both gone in a taxi," he said. "I saw them out of the front window. They did n't stop for breakfast. Look here, Claire, I can't stay here now; it will be impossible. You can't either. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet, Jamie, what I shall do, but I know what I would do in your place — go to Paris."

"Really, Claire?" Jamie's face lighted for a moment, and then grew dubious. "But, Claire, how can I?"

"I have money enough."

In thinking of the uncertain future, she had felt that she would be less hampered alone, and that Jamie must not be with her, but Paris only recurred to her at the moment. "Would you like to go, Jamie?"

"Would I! But, Claire, would n't you need me here?"

"No, Jamie. I'd rather feel that you were doing what you've always wanted to. I might even come to join you later, and you could have a place there ready for me. You really would like to go?"

"I'd love it, Claire, if you're sure it would be all right. When do you suppose —?"

"Why, any time."

"How about George?"

"We won't say anything to George, or any one else. We'll just go ahead and do it."

George was now in Dudley's office and was occupying a very modern bachelor flat farther uptown.

"Shall we go to Cook's after breakfast, and look up the sailings?"

At this indication of the concrete nature of Claire's proposition, Jamie's face lighted up once more, and as they went down to breakfast together, his whistle echoed cheerfully through the house.

"Shall I telephone for the car?" he broke off to ask.

"No, let's walk, Jamie." And immediately after breakfast they started, but as Claire was about to enter the steamship agency, she drew back. Jamie noticed, and said, "What's the matter?" — and Claire was given no choice. She went in. Felix was standing at the counter. Claire flushed and trembled. All her determination had been called into play to write and post that second letter, and now another drain upon her strength was asked of her.

"I wonder if he is as tired as I am," Claire asked herself; and indeed he looked fatigued and sad.

"When are *you* going, Felix?" Jamie asked.

"The day after to-morrow," Felix answered.

"I am going, too!" Jamie announced triumphantly.

"When?" Felix said quickly.

"We don't know yet. Very soon."

"Let him come with me, Mrs. Orville" — Felix's look was so imploring, so charged with what she knew him to be feeling at that moment, that Claire herself found it difficult not to betray her own emotion.

"But he is going to Paris."

"But he could go by way of England. Let him come with me. If he cared to stop with me a week in London, I promise that I will go with him to Paris for a day or so, and see that he gets properly installed there."

This had been the flaw in Claire's plan — Jamie's first arrival in Paris, alone — and Felix's proposal could not have been more opportune. Jamie had moved over to speak to one of the clerks, and Felix added in an undertone:

"Your note came this morning. That is why I am here. Oh, Claire, must it be so?"

"You know it must. Don't make it any harder."

"Then let him come with me. He will be a tie between us. I won't feel then that I have lost you utterly."

Jamie approached again.

"Could you be ready by the day after to-morrow, Jamie?"

"I could be ready this afternoon. I suppose I could get my trousers pressed on board — eh, Felix? All I really need is time to pack, and a traveling-cap. It's too good to be true — but" — and his expression changed suddenly — "you're sure, Claire?"

"Yes, yes," Claire answered hurriedly.

"Shall I see you once more?" Felix asked while Jamie was getting his passage.

"Perhaps — please go now, Felix — perhaps, at the boat — and perhaps sometimes I shall send a message by Jamie."

"And you love me — tell me once more."

"Yes, yes, always — please, Felix — good-bye."

Her eyes were brimming. She turned away quickly. She must be strong. It did n't matter what Dudley had done to her, she would expiate what she had done to him, the whole injustice of her marriage to him, and her subsequent disloyalty in thought and action.

"I say, Claire," Jamie said later, "do you think I'd better dine at home? I don't."

"No, don't, Jamie; just keep out of Dudley's way. He and I will settle matters somehow, and a third person only makes it more difficult."

But Orville did not come to Ninth Street to dinner, nor did he return that night. This was on Monday. On Tuesday morning Claire found a short note from him, saying that George would come down and have a talk with her on the following day, but that in the meantime he, Dudley, thought it best not to go to Ninth Street. There was nothing, therefore, to prevent Jamie's coming and going as he pleased, until Wednesday.

Jamie was to leave the house immediately after breakfast on Wednesday morning, for the boat. Claire found that there were many things which she could get for him, and she spent most of Tuesday in shopping.

Jamie himself was busy packing. She reached home late Tuesday afternoon, her car filled with boxes containing a quantity of small things she had been buying for him. She had them taken to his room, where she found him in his shirt-sleeves. A trunk stood at the foot of his bed, a hat-box and two bags rested on a table and chairs, and as this pretty well filled his room, another trunk had been placed just outside his door. The bed was piled with a variety of things, shirts, trousers, hats, and cravats.

Claire, in spite of her unhappiness, could not forbear laughing —

“Are you going to take all this?”

Jamie looked up in surprise — “Why, yes. I’m taking all I’ve got. Just as well to be prepared for emergencies. Besides, I don’t know when I shall be back.”

“Why not get some clothes in London, Jamie? A week will give you plenty of time. And you don’t need a hat-box. London is *the* place for top hats, is n’t it?”

“*Ra-ther*,” Jamie answered.

“If I were you I would only take one trunk and your bags, and no hat-box at all. Just take your very best things, and get measured for whatever you need, in London. When you get your top hat, buy a hat-box for it, too.”

“Oh, Claire, you are a brick!” She could see that he was touched, and putting her arms about him, she said, “And you will be good, Jamie?”

“I swear it, Claire; and I want to tell you something.



Each time I've told you that before, I was n't sure of myself. Now I am. I'm on the right track now. But look here, I've got to rearrange all this." And he began turning out the contents of his trunks, an absurd miscellaneous collection in addition to his clothing, which made Claire laugh again.

By seven, however, the trunk and the two bags, with Claire's help, were completely packed, and Claire went to her room to change her dress for dinner. As she came downstairs, Jamie was hanging up the telephone receiver. "I've just had Felix on the 'phone," he announced, "to make sure that everything was all right. I told him we'd meet him by the gangplank in the morning."

"Oh, Jamie!" cried Claire, involuntarily.

"What?" Jamie asked.

"Nothing — that is, did we put in your new dressing-gown?"

"Catch me leaving *that* out! It's a beauty, Claire."

She had hoped that some chance would enable her to see Felix once more, in the morning, but Jamie had made it impossible. Her sensitiveness caused her to shrink from the possibility of Felix construing Jamie's appointment as a message from her. And yet she still hoped, and after dinner, as they sat in the drawing-room, she struggled to adhere to a resolve she had made, not to go with Jamie to the boat.

Outside, the waning day was passing in a glow of violet, pink, and gold, melting slowly into dusky blue. A

soft gloom filled the drawing-room lighted only by the single lamp which burned by the piano, where Jamie sat. Claire, sunk in the silken cushions of her chair, rested in silence, in the shadows cast by the faint light which still filled the street.

“What was that pretty song you played so long ago, Jamie? — the verses of some English poet you set to music — Dowson, I think — ‘All that I had, I brought.’”

“Yes, I know!” And Jamie began to play, and as he played, she heard Mallette repeating,

“All that I had, I brought,
Little enough I know;
A poor rhyme roughly wrought,
A rose to match thy snow —
All that I had, I brought.”

Ah, love, ah, yearning! The minor of Jamie’s melody gave voice to all Claire’s unuttered and unutterable thoughts. She remembered well the night, long ago, when Jamie had played it, when life, like some gorgeous, beautiful, and strange flower, seemed about to open for her. Alas, it had bloomed too late! All that she had, she had brought; but now, it could not matter. She did not know that Jamie had stopped, until she saw that he was standing beside her, looking down at her.

“Claire, what is it? How can I leave you with that brute?”

“You could n’t help, Jamie. George is coming down, to-morrow, and then we can decide. There’s nothing to

worry about. Come, now, you must go to bed. You must be very tired."

But they did not go until Claire, getting up, said, late in the evening, that she could not keep awake a moment longer; but when they reached Claire's room, something having occurred to Jamie, he stopped there, and they began to talk once more. Jamie finally said "good-night," and climbed to his room, but he had hardly lighted his pipe and surrendered himself to a rapt contemplation of the future, when his door opened, and Claire entered. She had forgotten something which she wished to mention, or was reluctant to leave him. They began to play with the situation humorously, tenderly, and yet half sadly.

"Jamie, really I must go now —"

"All right, but what was it you were going to say about learning French?"

"I've told you twice. You're inventing excuses to make me stay."

Jamie, not being able to think of anything for the moment, Claire asked:

"Do you think you can make your letter of credit last for six months, Jamie?"

"Two thousand dollars! I'll make it last a year; you'll see." And a discussion followed on the best way to live economically in Paris. It was two o'clock before, straining in a final embrace, they said "good-night."

"How shall we ever be ready, Jamie? We must leave by nine."

But at nine, when Jamie's taxi arrived, they were quite ready. Jamie's trunk was fastened on, and they got in. On the way they were silent at first, but suddenly Jamie said:

"Look here! You should n't have married him."

"It is n't altogether his fault, Jamie."

"But you were so much too good for him. I used to say that our family valued certain things too much; but Dudley does n't value anything. I mean, there is nothing in the world that Dudley venerates. There is nothing that is capable of lifting him up, of exalting him. Children might for a time, but that's about all. Another thing, Claire. He's like that — about women — I've been hearing things lately. He's always been like that. You'd better divorce him, Claire."

"I'll see, Jamie."

As they approached the dock, Claire said with an effort:

"I think I won't go in with you, Jamie."

Jamie looked at her with quick disappointment.

"Won't Felix think it's rude?"

"Tell him — tell him that leave-takings like this are so difficult; I mean the waiting, and all that. He'll understand. And then, it's hard to let you go, Jamie!"

The taxi had stopped before the entrance to the pier, and Jamie sat for a moment with a very sober face.

"Come, Jamie, you must go."

Jamie roused himself, said "Bing!" with an air of bravado, found himself in Claire's embrace, for a mo-

ment embracing her, and then descended to the street. A porter had already seized his luggage. He thrust his head in at the door —

“Good-bye, Claire — good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Jamie, good-bye — good-bye.”

She watched his slim figure as it receded quickly down the long perspective of the pier, and to Claire, in the stoop of his back as he pushed forward, the set of his shoulders, the eager swing of his legs, the slant of his stick and his elbows, he symbolized youth setting out on one knew not what superb adventures. He faced about and waved to her. Farther and farther he receded into the mingled lights and shadows of the pier, growing smaller and still smaller, until, turning again, he waved once more, and vanished, a pigmy among the crowd of pigmies swarming toward its distant end.

At the house, Maggie stopped her in the lower hall.

“Mr. George is here,” she said in a whisper, “and when he found that Mr. Jamie had gone away, he had a long talk with Mr. Orville on the telephone. I know, because I heard him call the office number.”

Maggie knew other things, too, evidently. George was waiting for her in the drawing-room.

“What’s this I hear about Jamie’s going away? Maggie says —”

“Yes, he’s off to Paris. I’ve just come from the dock.”

“To Paris — what the —”

"He always wanted to go, and now he's gone."

George turned, and led the way into Dudley's den, closed the door, and lowering his voice to a portentous whisper, he said, solemnly:

"Look here, Claire, what's this Dudley's been telling me about you and Mallette?"

A flush of crimson Claire could not control suffused her face.

"I should think you *would* blush; I should think you *would!* To think that my sister —"

"Is that the reason Dudley left the house?"

"Of course it is!"

"I never thought before that Dudley was a hypocrite. Did he tell you anything about himself?"

"Yes, but that's an altogether different thing. To think that you, the sister I've always looked up to, could so far forget —"

"George if you insist on talking that kind of nonsense, I shall not listen to you. What do you, or what does Dudley want?"

"Dudley wants a divorce."

"Do you mean that he would be willing to expose Helena, if I should consent, to such a scandal?"

"He proposes to divorce *you*."

"I never heard anything so absurd in my life!" Claire cried, now thoroughly angry — "especially after what Jamie —"

"But Jamie is n't here."

"I see! That altered the situation, did n't it? I sup-

pose that was the reason you telephoned Dudley, when you found out that he had gone."

George winced perceptibly.

"All I've got to do is to cable him, and he'll come back again. I'm not an utter fool, George."

"Dudley can put you in a very awkward position so far as money goes, Claire; but he really feels terribly about the whole thing."

"No, he does n't, George. Dudley never feels terribly about anything. I wronged Dudley in marrying him. I know that, and he knows it, too, but I feel much more terribly about it than he does. Dudley is too strong, too impervious, ever to be made really unhappy by anything. The only thing about the situation that is of help to me is that I am beginning to realize that I have hurt myself much more than I have hurt him. Wait a moment, I must get you something I want you to give him."

Claire ran upstairs, opened her secret safe, and took from it her jewel-case of morocco leather. In it was all her jewelry: the superb new necklace Dudley had given her, the older one, her rings, earrings, watches, and bracelets. She looked once at their lambent or sparkling coruscations, closed the lid again, and going downstairs, placed the case in George's hands.

"Please give this to Dudley, and tell him that I shall not be his mistress any longer, and that he had better give this to his new favorite," indicating the new necklace.

"Do you know what this is worth?" George de-

manded. "Dudley told me he paid a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for it. Do you mean to say you're going to give it back to him?"

"Yes, I am going to give it back. Do you know why he gave it to me? As a *quid pro quo* for allowing him to do what he pleased. I did n't understand at the time, but I do now."

"Look here, Claire, would you be willing to sue Dudley for a divorce, and leave Helena out of it?"

"How could I?"

"I mean if he were willing to get you the necessary evidence — with some one else."

"Is n't that what they call collusion?"

"That's what they call it, yes, but —"

"But I can't, George; I don't believe in that sort of thing. You have no right to ask me."

"You admit that you should n't have married Dudley and yet you refuse to give him his freedom."


"I don't refuse. He is free, is n't he? He's not living here."

"But suppose he should want to marry?"

"I see! So that's what Helena's after. Very well, I have n't the slightest objection to Helena's marrying Dudley, but I shall not take part in any conspiracy to enable her to. Suppose I sue Dudley, and name Helena as co-respondent."

"Good Heavens!" cried George in consternation. "You would n't do that, would you?"

"No, I would n't," Claire answered.



"And you won't consent to do it the other way?"

"I can't, George."

"Very well. Then I'll have to see Dudley again about it." And George, with an injured air, took his departure.

It was luncheon-time, and Claire went into the dining-room, but immediately afterwards she left the house, crossed the Square, walked down under the Elevated, and took one of the little cross-town cars, small and shabby, with wooden benches running along the sides covered with strips of threadbare carpet so begrimed that she could hardly bring herself to sit on them. In this vehicle she began to penetrate wide districts which she had never seen before, teeming with immense swarms of people, mostly foreign, choking the entire roadway, until she reached the street on which the hospital stood. The police officer had told her, the night before, the car to take, and on getting out she found herself within half a block of her destination. It was a small red-brick building about five stories high. She mounted the three steps which led to the front door, opened it, and found herself in a vestibule, where an oldish, dowdy woman, in a nurse's uniform, sat at a table.

"I came to inquire about a poor woman who was brought here last night," Claire explained.

"What name?" the nurse demanded perfunctorily.

"I don't know her name," Claire answered.

"What address?"

"I don't know the number; she lived in Eighth Street, in a tenement."

The problem of identifying the patient seemed to present insuperable difficulties to the nurse, but, luckily, at that moment a door close at hand was pushed open, and another woman entered. She was a blonde of a pronounced German type, with a good-natured but inefficient face, and with a throaty quality of voice which Claire found unpleasant.

"Here's the head nurse," the first woman said, glad of an opportunity to get Claire off her hands. "She may know something about it." And Claire stated her errand.

"A little dark thing?" the head nurse asked. "She won't be leaving here for a good while."

"Was she badly hurt?" Claire asked.

"He beat her pretty badly; but it is n't that. It's wonderful what some of them can stand. She's sick, anyway — acute anæmia."

Claire could not remember that she had ever heard of acute anæmia, and asked if it were dangerous. The nurse answered, "Yes," and stared at her; adding, "Have you ever been in a hospital before?"

"No," Claire replied, "but I thought perhaps I might like — I mean, I do want to get work in one. Do you think you could take me?"

The head nurse threw her head back and laughed shrilly. "Well, you don't know much, do you? You'd better see what one is like first."

"Is it very dreadful?"

The head nurse did not understand what Claire

meant; she had plainly never put this question to herself.

"It's a way to make a living, like anything else. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, I would," Claire answered.

The head nurse rose, and opening the door by which she had come in, entered one of the wards, followed by Claire, who found herself at once in an atmosphere charged with the odor of disinfectants. She had a confused impression, afterwards, of a number of rooms containing rows of beds, some filled with men, and some with women, some lying still, others reading newspapers, nurses moving about, and each containing an atmosphere as of something hovering not far away, as of some immanent presence. In a corner of one ward she saw a small head with glossy, smooth, blue-black hair. The covering of the bed indicated a slight, small form, which lay completely motionless, so far as Claire could tell, even without breath. The head nurse hurried Claire through the wards and returned to her office. Claire was repelled, made ill almost, not so much by what she actually saw as at what her imagination told her the real life of such a place would reveal to her, and yet she determined to find work here or in some similar place, if it were possible. She meant to know something of life beyond her narrow orbit, to sound its depths, to learn what it had to offer to that outcast army Mallette and others were trying to help.

"Do you still think you'd like to come?" the

head nurse asked, when they had returned to her office.

Claire replied that her mind was still unchanged.

"Well, there's one way you can do it. You can take a course uptown as a trained attendant, and you can volunteer for hospital work here if you want to. It is n't obligatory, but if you did, you would be expected to come here three times a week. I don't suppose there would be any objection to your coming oftener if you wanted to."

"How long does the course last?" Claire asked.

"Three months."

"And could I begin at any time?"

"Yes, any time."

Claire took the address and rose to go —

"You're sure you want to try it?" the nurse asked warningly. "You don't look as if you'd ever done much work, and it is n't easy."

"I am very strong," Claire answered, "and I really want to. If they will take me, you will see me again."

When she reached home she found George waiting for her once more. He advanced, and said in a low voice, "Have you thought it over?"

"There was n't anything to think over, George."

"Then it's going to be war! Is that it?" he asked portentously.

"Oh, George, don't be so absurd."

"Well, Dudley's pretty angry, and you know what he's like when he gets started."

"But what can I do? Dudley wants me to consent to a conspiracy in order that he may get his freedom, and in order that Helena may be protected. I don't object to any part of Dudley's programme — perhaps I ought to call it Helena's — except the conspiracy, and that I do object to."

"Dudley has made up his mind that you must consent."

"And if I don't?"

"Then, as I said, it will be war."

"In that case it will be Dudley who declares war, not I."

"Look here, Claire, do be reasonable. You don't know how nasty Dudley can be, and he's determined to get his freedom immediately. I must say you made a mistake in sending Jamie away. It weakened your position tremendously."

"I have n't any position. But, George, if I refuse to live with him, I am deserting him — are n't I? Is n't desertion a ground for divorce? Could n't he get it from me?"

"Yes, but it takes too long."

"How long?"

"About a year; but he'd have to establish a residence in the West."

"I'm sure he could do it if he wanted to. That is the only way, George, even if it does take a little longer. I could n't consent to the other. It's too disgusting and sordid."

George went away, but in the evening, as Claire sat reading a book, in Dudley's den, the bell rang, and in a moment he appeared for the third time. He closed the door, and held out the jewel-case Claire had given him.

"Dudley understood why you sent back the large necklace, but the other things, he says, belong to you."

"That's very nice of him, George, but I'd rather he kept them."

"He says he won't take them."

"I don't want him to be kind to me, George, because I can't do what he wants me to. Please, I'd rather not keep them."

George received the jewel-case again with a show of reluctance, and said: "But we've got to get this thing settled one way or another. Dudley says he will be very generous if you'll get a divorce as he suggested. He will give you the evidence, and it can be tried before a referee, so that there won't be any publicity."

"Does he think, when I refused, that I expected to be bribed? I won't take anything, George."

"You mean you won't do it?"

"Yes."

"Why can't you be reasonable? He's determined to get it. You have n't got anything, Claire. The house is his. You have n't any money in the bank, have you?"

"Not much."

"And you've got Jamie on your hands. If you do what Dudley wants, you'll be independent for life. If you don't, you'll have practically nothing."

"And to be independent I must engage detectives, and be a party to a really sordid conspiracy. I shall not do it. I refuse to live with Dudley, and in some States that is ground for divorce. Let him get it from me."

"Then, if that is your final decision, I have done all I can, and you must take the consequences," George answered soberly; and he got up.

"It seems to me that you're rather siding with Dudley, George."

"No, I'm not, Claire. Of course, we're in pretty deep together, in various ways; but I really can't see things as you see them; neither can Dudley. Well, good-night, I'll help you all I can, of course."

"Do you really mean that you can't see that people ought n't to do that kind of thing?"

"They're doing it all the time," George answered.

"But that is n't answering my question."

"I really think you're splitting hairs," was George's final retort.

CHAPTER XXI

CLAIRE called the next morning at the address given by the head nurse, paid the necessary fee, and on the following Monday began her course as a trained attendant. She did not apply for hospital work at once, because of her complete lack of experience, and it was not until a month later that she saw the hospital again. During this time she was taught the preliminary course of first aid, the care of the sick in emergency, the care of convalescents and of infants. Later, how to make beds while occupied, marvelously simple when once demonstrated, various forms of baths, to take the temperature, respiration, and pulse. Later still, the emergency treatment of fractures and hemorrhages, how to bandage arms, legs, shoulder blades, ankles, heads, and eyes — the care of all the accidents man is heir to in the turmoil of city life; how to note appearances and symptoms; the significance of paleness, flush, emaciation, obesity. She learned that there was a right way and a wrong way to give medicine. She learned the names of bones, and studied the processes of circulation; the emergency care of people when under the influence of drink or narcotics; the diet necessary in different ailments; ventilation, light, rubbings, washings, and feedings.

All this Claire found intensely interesting, and yet

she dreaded the time when she must put it into practical application.

One day, on returning to Ninth Street, she found that an agent had placed a sign on the house, announcing that it was for sale or for rent. She had determined to close it and send the keys to Dudley, but she had been so occupied with her new work that she had lacked the energy requisite for the necessary packing and the discharge of the servants; and yet these resolves failed to mitigate the shock she received on seeing the sign. It came as a slap in the face. A notice to quit, impersonal, and yet implacable. She flushed as she saw it, crossed at once to Aunt Kate's, and rang the bell.

The door was opened by Weston. His jaws were working in a final effort before swallowing, and he smelt unmistakably of chocolate creams. Claire knew that he was inordinately fond of sweets. She had with an effort, but with the aid of a strong sense of family solidarity, succeeded in learning to call him "Will."

"How do you do, Will?" The name always sounded extraordinarily banal when she used it in addressing Weston. "Is Aunt Kate at home?" — but before she could answer, the smallish dog bustled into the drawing-room, seeming to say, "Well, I never! Sorry to be late, but I got here as soon as I possibly could"; and immediately disappeared under the drawing-room sofa in response to a negligent kick which Will had applied to its hindquarters.

"Yes, Kate's upstairs — Kate! Kate! Here's Claire.

(She'll be right down.) By the way, have you heard my new exposition of 'The Niebelungen'? Well, it's the greatest ever. I did it for Schluch the other day, and what do you suppose he said?" Will had seated himself at the piano. Prestissimo, fortissimo, crash, bang, bang, br-r-r-r-r-r — tum-ti-tum-ti-tum. "Curtain rises, revealing the Rhine Maidens guarding the Rheingold. Sinuous movement of flutes and violins. Motive number one —"

"For goodness sake, shut up! Claire has n't come over to listen to you!" This from Kate, who had come in, and was unable to make herself heard. "Claire, come upstairs."

The place smelt of old cigarettes and general staleness. Will stopped, unmistakably offended.

"He makes so much noise about the place you can't hear yourself think — come on, Claire." And as Claire followed her, thinking of her first call with Kate, and that Will's Wagnerian expositions had plainly lost much of their potency, Kate asked in an undertone, "What have you put a sign on your house for?"

"Dudley and I have agreed to disagree."

"I thought that might be it. I suppose you know a little more about men than you did before you got married! So do I."

"I wanted to know if I could have a room here. I would pay for it, of course."

"Have you made any kind of an arrangement with Dudley?"

"Not yet," Claire answered, not wishing to go into details; "but I intend to close the house, and I want a place to live."

"But what are you going to do? You must make Dudley give you a big allowance."

"I will see, Aunt Kate. I can't tell yet; but until I know definitely I would like to come here, if I might."

Kate, finding that Claire was not inclined to be communicative, finally got up, and showed her a room which she said she could give her. To Claire's surprise — Kate was notoriously close-fisted — she refused to discuss payment for it, saying that Claire, for the present at least, must stay there as her guest.

Claire recrossed the street and plunged into the process of terminating her domestic affairs. Dudley had sent no intimation as to the outstanding bills, and Claire paid them herself. She discharged and paid the servants, with the exception of Maggie, who was to be taken by Kate as soon as Claire had finished with her. Innumerable letters and papers must be destroyed. All her finery, trunk upon trunk of hats, shoes, and gowns, were packed for storage in Kate's cellar. She kept out only what she immediately needed. She wished to strip herself, as an athlete strips for the contest, for the battle she was soon to take part in, and as the end of these labors approached, she began to feel free; her shackles were dropping away from her. She would lift her arms, straining the muscles of her shoulders, and look up and forward, as if awaiting some signal. Ah, how she had

hated that sheltered and stupid past! Life, like some strange flower, was finally about to open. Perhaps not beautiful, perhaps at first even sordid and terrible, but at least a test of courage, a struggle, a straining, deep inhalations, the play of fortitude and hope, and perhaps somehow, at last, in some way she could not understand, Felix coming for her, searching for her, and finding her. The final and stark realization of the impossible nature of her relations with Dudley, and her deliverance from them, made her careless of the future. After paying the servants and the house bills, she had not much left, a thousand dollars or so; but she did not care. She possessed herself. She was free to come and go, to swing on the tides of life, careless of material things. Even Jamie, away and dependent, did not, in her present mood, arouse anxiety, and it was without regret that she turned the key in its lock and left the house for the last time.

The expressmen had taken her numerous trunks across the street, and had carried the one she had packed for immediate use up to her room. She had followed them, and on their departure had closed her door with the intention of unpacking; but she did not begin. She had seen the room only once before, a casual glance into a darkened apartment, late in the afternoon, and she had not known until now that it contained her old furniture. She had told Kate to take what she wanted when Dudley had decided on completely refurnishing and renovating, and even to the rug on the floor, the

window curtains, and the bed, all her old things were there. They seemed to say to her: "So glad to have you back! Sit down and rest a little."

When in response to a dowdy maid's announcement of dinner, she descended the stairs, she saw in the sitting-room on the second floor some of the saddle-bag furniture, and on one wall the painting by Neolini, and when in the dining-room Maggie began to bump the dishes down, something she had had no opportunity to do since the advent of the harmonious Japanese butler, it seemed almost — almost but not quite — as if her old life had been going on without interruption, and that her marriage had been but a glittering and uneasy dream.

After dinner Kate took her to the sitting-room on the second floor, informing Will that he was to stay downstairs. Will thereupon began, in the drawing-room immediately underneath them, with unnecessary violence, one of his Wagnerian expositions. This caused the smallish dog, who had accompanied them upstairs, to break into vociferous vocalisms, terminating in a sharp yelp when Kate, removing her slipper, succeeded in catching him a smart slap with it, and to disappear immediately under the saddle-bag sofa.

"We can't hear anything here!" Kate exclaimed with a gesture of vexation. "He is the noisiest man in New York! Come up to your room."

Claire went up disinclined to make a confidante of Kate, but the fact that she had had no other woman to speak to resulted finally in a conversation which lasted

until bedtime. She was glad afterwards that she had done so. The stimulation of Kate's family partisanship invigorated her. She did not mention Helena, but Kate's resentment against George found further excitement in her learning that he was acting as Dudley's emissary.

"Trying to browbeat his own sister! That's just like him! But, Claire, you ought to have consented. Dudley would be willing to give you a great deal of money. Have you anything now?"

"Not much," Claire answered.

"But what are you going to do? For the rest of your life you can't live on nothing."

"I am learning hospital work. Nurses are well paid."

"Good heavens and earth! As if you'd ever be content with *that*! You're too young. Settle with Dudley, and enjoy yourself."

"I'm tired of enjoying myself. I want to work — hard."

"And suppose you get tired of working; you're making a mistake, Claire. Think it over."

But Claire was too tired to think anything over that night, and hurried to bed and forgetfulness immediately on Kate's leaving her.

For another month Claire continued her course before she felt sufficiently equipped to begin her work at the hospital. During this time she studied vigorously, following alone the ramifications which continually led away from the trained attendant's course, and when she

could do so, attending clinics. These at first aroused in her a faintness which it required all her courage to overcome. The work absorbed her, and yet repelled her, but in her freedom she found an immense solace, troubled only by the problem of her bond with Dudley. After her first rejection of his purpose she asked herself many times if she had done right. She had, as George said, wronged him in marrying him, and yet she would not give him his freedom except in her way. Their marriage was wrong, and to connive at a divorce such as he wanted was wrong, and two wrongs do not make a right; — but was that, after all, true? Should she not be willing to commit one wrong to right another? But to conspire to cheat the law was not only inherently immoral, it was illegal, too. The problem was a difficult one, and caused her many anxious hours.

Although the relations between Kate and Weston proved to be far from harmonious, Claire enjoyed the comfort and isolation of her life there, except that Will's manner toward her began to arouse occasional misgivings. His persistent egoistic preoccupation had given way to elephantine attempts to display a dashing manner when Claire was present. She wondered whether Kate noticed it. If she stopped in the drawing-room, or library above, he would be sure to come in. Once or twice when they were alone together, he had by some pretext, a book he wished her to look at, or a musical score he was supposed to be working on, taken a seat beside her and pressed slightly against her. He was con-

stantly getting too close to her, and once his hand brushed her cheek. He apologized, but she could not tell whether it was accident or not. After this, unless Kate were at hand, she kept rigorously to her room. One night, a fortnight later, after she had gone there, she heard a stealthy step in the hall, a rustling at her door, and an envelope was pushed quickly under it. She picked it up and opened it: it was a ridiculous love letter, absurd, and almost incoherent. It was evident that she must find some pretext for leaving; but where could she go? She shrank from the thought of it. She would be alone, completely alone. She sighed. Life was becoming difficult. At this time she had been in the hospital for a week, a week of fatigue, disgust, and horror. When she had first gone there the head nurse, who was obviously surprised at seeing her again, showed her first into a small room, where she changed into the nurse's uniform she had brought with her, and then, leading the way to an upper floor, left her with the nurse in charge, saying:

“You understand, of course, that you are to begin at the beginning.”

Claire's duties lay in all the wards on that floor, both for men and women. These wards were filled with the riffraff of the streets, the dregs of life, or from the nameless millions who work and die. The men were negroes and whites, of all nationalities and trades — Russians, Germans, Jews, Americans, and Scandinavians, sailors, longshoremen, news-vendors, laborers, and outlaws.

Some had been beaten and robbed while drunk. Others had been injured by elevator accidents, in fights, falling down shafts and holds, the breaking of scaffoldings, run over by taxi-cabs. There were fractured spines, broken bones, ghastly cuts, horrible abrasions; the beds were filled with every type and age, scrawny boys, young men, brawny and powerful middle-aged men, brutal and hairy men, and the old, old derelicts who make the rounds of the hospitals, and who, to simulate fever, rub the clinical thermometers with the tongue. Claire had to count the filthy and blood-stained clothing of all these wretches when they were brought in. Priests came often and administered the last sacrament. Each night, at the end of these first days, Claire thought that she could not go back, but fighting down that sense of approaching faintness which she had felt at the clinics and which again assailed her often, she persevered.

Diseases, not accidents, filled the beds of the women's wards, diseases of every kind, determined and undetermined, diseases of the heart, the kidneys, pneumonia, jaundice, diabetes, syphilis, typhoid. They were ignorant, vulgar and obscene; more so than the men; and all these bodies Claire washed — emaciated, greenish-white bodies, pale, obese bodies, scarred and mutilated bodies, legs with broken, blue veins, swollen feet.

In a corner of the ward the blue-black head of the little foreign woman lay always quite still. Claire was told that there was no hope for her, but some special appeal drew her constantly to her bedside. She was too

ill to be bathed, but Claire would sit gently rubbing her back, where the vertebræ of her spine stood out in sharp ridges. At first this seemed to ease her discomfort, but soon Claire was forced to stop, because she moaned continually as if it hurt her. She seemed like some little, pathetic animal, accepting, without understanding or protest, the dictates of a grievous destiny.

In this small hospital many duties fell to Claire's lot which in a larger one she would have escaped. The routine began at nine o'clock, when beds must be made according to the formulæ learned in the school. This, which was supposed to take an hour, usually took two; therefore it was never finished when at ten the interne, a tall, conceited-looking young Jew with a small black mustache and full red lips, began to make his rounds. Claire was obliged to follow him and watch the inspection of wounds. The remainder of the morning was spent, besides the giving of baths, in taking respiration, pulse, and temperature. Often special breakfasts must be prepared, eggs, toast, and coffee, glasses of milk passed, charts made out, test-tubes prepared. The diet charts for each patient must be studied: restricted diets, liquid diets, salt-free diets. Bread must be cut and spread, and dinner, which was carried in by orderlies, must be distributed: soup poured out, tea made, ice cracked and put in bags, and bathtubs washed with disinfectants. In addition, mouth-washes in sputum jars must be distributed, tables, window-sills, and chairs dusted, and all instruments boiled constantly by elec-

tricity, in nickel boxes. In the afternoon the visiting surgeon came. This happened usually when backs were being rubbed with alcohol to prevent bed sores, crumbs brushed out, pillows turned, and sheets tightened. With him went the head nurse, the interne who read the charts, and another nurse who took notes. He visited only the most serious cases, and no talking or whispering was permitted at this time. And all this, on the part of all concerned, with a mechanical and perfunctory routine almost inhibiting sympathy or interest on the one side, or appreciation on the other. Twice a week, to the disgust of the frowsy nurses, two thin, pale women dressed in black would appear in the ward, followed by a negro carrying a folding harmonium. He would proceed to set this up, when one of the women would seat herself before it, and to its accompaniment they would begin to sing hymns, in which the patients joined. After half an hour of this they would disappear into another part of the building, followed by the grimaces, burlesque gestures, and sarcastic comments of the nurses.

Sometimes a patient well enough to leave, and almost unrecognizable in street clothing, would appear for a moment to say good-bye, and disappear; but more often not. Often, when Claire reached the hospital in the morning, a bed or two would be empty. These patients Claire knew that she would not see again, but the departures caused by death aroused as little general interest as those due to recovery. Their places were filled,

and things went on as before. The telephone would ring, and a new arrival would be announced. Claire would be told to prepare a bed. The age, respiration, and temperature would be taken at once. If able to walk, Claire led the new arrivals to the bathroom, and washed them there. If not, she washed them in bed. Their clothes were taken from them, tied in squares of linen, and put away. They looked almost always undernourished, anæmic, or yellow, with strong body odors, and dirty and callous feet. Their heads, too, almost always infected with lice, must be washed. And she began to share Felix's feeling of rebellion at existing conditions. She was appalled by the brutishness, filth, and stupidity of all these people. The weight which pressed them down to the level of the animal was undoubtedly the weight of ignorance, and ignorance was the offspring of poverty.

Each morning a news-vendor would make the rounds, selling his papers. He was waited for eagerly, and after his departure continuous rustling would fill the wards. Salvation Army women called occasionally with gifts of fruit and cocoa, and on visitors' day, twice a week, a husband or brother would appear, awkward and ill at ease. Some of the patients were allowed to propel themselves in wheeled chairs from one place to another.

The little foreign woman got no better. She was very frail, very emaciated. There was something inexpressibly touching to Claire in her little wide, sunken face with its expression as of dim wonder at the dull riddle of

her own existence. Often she talked half deliriously in some strange patois which no one could understand.

Other types interested, even fascinated her, but without arousing the sympathy she felt for this little derelict slowly but surely floating out into the unknown. One, a very beautiful Norwegian with milky skin and red-gold hair. She had had pneumonia, but had recovered. She seemed perfectly able to leave, and yet her temperature was extremely variable, and a cough still persisted. The cough seemed well under control, and it was suspected that she, too, by some means increased the record of the clinical thermometer, to indicate fever. During the first week an old, melancholy colored woman, dying of cancer, called continually, "Nurse, nurse," in a thin voice plaintive and exhausted. "Nurse, nurse," over and over. At night Claire still heard it over and over. One morning her bed was empty.

An enormous woman, muscular and vicious-looking, whose feet extended beyond the end of the bed, lay still, day after day, with dead gray eyes, and stupid, heavy, masklike face. Her condition usually was subnormal, but occasionally she had fever. She was very ill, almost in coma, and looked as if intelligence had already departed. One morning Claire was ordered to take her to the ground floor to be X-rayed. Her chest was to be photographed. A wheeled stretcher was brought in, and with the help of others she managed to get her on it. The patient muttered something, over and over, something which sounded like "I can't do it — I can't do it."

Claire covered her with a blanket, wheeled her to the lift, and went down with her. The X-ray room was at the end of a passage, up an incline. Claire, with an effort, got her up it. The wheels of the stretcher swayed. The operator indicated the position and, disappearing, looked through an aperture. "Now, steady"; a buzzing and flashing ensued, a green and yellow light, and a sulphurous smell. The woman lay motionless, with her dead gray eyes. Claire wheeled her to the lift, and back once more to the ward. The next morning her bed, too, was empty.

So it went, amid an odor of food, disinfectants, anæsthetics, and the exhalations of diseased bodies. Claire could not understand how those around her could become accustomed to this daily sight of death, suffering, wounds, blood, and dirt. It seemed to arouse no emotions either in the physicians or the nurses, and while this insensibility shocked her, she saw that without it they could not have gone on with the work they had to do. She herself had begun to grow in a slight degree accustomed to it, but she saw that her present course could lead her nowhere. The thought of choosing the profession of nursing was now so distasteful to her that she could not understand how she had ever seriously thought of it; but she must not, on that account, for the present abandon it. She meant to see it through; she would persevere, trusting and hoping that fate would show her a way out.

Often at night, her nerves on edge, exhausted by the

performance of disgusting and menial duties, feeling unable to listen to the jarring exchanges of Kate and Weston, or the latter's attempts at elegant playfulness, she would dine at some restaurant, and go directly to her room, where she would attempt, without success, to set the stage of her imagination with scenes of beauty and fascination, to drive out the stark realities of her daily life. She strove to make real once more that night, when in the dusk of the Square she lay for a moment in Felix's arms. She tried to lose herself in dreams, where, in an atmosphere of delicate perfumes, the frou-frou of elegant dresses, sunk in soft cushions, walking in gardens bright with parterres of flowers, she lived always with Felix an existence of perfect and untroubled ease: but she was unable to banish the present. Her imaginative impulses were not strong enough to erase its impressions, and her dreams would dissolve, to give place to the pallid wards of the hospital. The odor of disinfectants would assail her nostrils, and she would seek her bed only to hear, in her troubled sleep, the plaintive, thin, exhausted cry, "Nurse, nurse," of the dying woman, see before her two dead, gray, unwinking, staring eyes in a brutal, stupid, immobile face, or the pallid features of the little Italian with their expression of dull resignation, of faint and futile wonder.

CHAPTER XXII

ONE morning the bed of the little Italian was hidden by two screens. The interne came twice and went away, and the nurses kept going in and out. Claire knew that this meant that she was dying. Claire's own duties were especially arduous that day, but in the afternoon, as the hour for leaving approached, the nurse in charge, speaking in a whisper, said, "Your little friend is dead; would you like to see her?"

A strange feeling of apprehension, of fear, seized Claire, but controlling it, she followed the nurse. Behind the screen she was lying in her nightgown. The bedclothes were turned down, and Claire could see the outlines of her frail and wasted body. The experience was unpleasant, but Claire had no feeling of repulsion. What struck her was the change of, or rather, lack of expression. Before, she had had a strained look, as if in constant pain. This was gone. Gone, too, was the human, individual look. Her flesh had collapsed, the teeth showed, the eyes were closed, and the skin very waxen. Claire felt that the little person she had known was not there.

The nurse, who had disappeared, returned with a rubber sheet, and asked Claire to help her move the body to the edge of the bed, so that the sheet might be placed under it. Claire controlled a shudder, and bent

forward with a supreme effort. The body felt warm and soft, very soft and non-resistant. When they lifted it slightly its strange, inert limpness seemed to signify that life, not death, had killed her, that life had drained her body to the dregs. The nurse slipped the nightdress down preliminary to the customary sponging, when Claire saw to her horror that the back and shoulders of the body were covered with scars, and at this evidence of the brutality which this frail creature must have suffered a sense of exhaustion prevailed over her, numbing and deadening all her sensibilities. She stood, supporting herself by the head of the bed, leaning against the wall while the nurse fastened the body in another sheet, and pinned to it the name and date of death. The stretcher was brought in. Claire with an effort roused herself, and followed it as it was rolled out again bearing its white burden.

She went down in the elevator and out into the street, thinking of that pale and wasted body. In the face of the terrific and unescapable reality of death, the streets, the people, seemed to assume the vague and uncertain attributes of objects seen in a dream.

She walked slowly home. That morning she had had her first letter from Jamie in Paris. Mallette had run over with him, and he was now settled. He had stopped longer in London than he had expected. In fact nearly a month. She had had a short note from him there saying that he would write again as soon as he had a permanent address to give her. They had forgotten to

arrange this before he had sailed, and the delay in hearing from him after his first note had caused Claire a certain amount of anxiety. She reached the house and went into the drawing-room. She was too exhausted to immediately climb the stairs to her room, and she sank inertly into a chair. A slight sound aroused her, and as she looked up she saw Weston had come close up to her. He looked about quickly and furtively. His face worked spasmodically under the influence of an extreme agitation. Claire sprang up instinctively, and as she did so he seized her hands and pushed her back into the corner, holding her there by the pressure of his own body.

"Why do you treat me so — why — why — do you always keep away from me? Don't you know I love you? Don't you know I love you more — more —"

"Oh — *don't!*" cried Claire, almost with a shriek. She wrenched her hands free, and with blazing eyes pushed him away. As she did so she saw Kate standing in the doorway. Weston saw her too. For a moment all stood silent, motionless in the somber light of the darkening room.

"Up to your tricks again, are you?" Kate said at last. "Go up to your room."

"Aunt Kate!" Claire cried.

"Oh, I don't mean *you*. Go up, do you hear?"

Will went past her, cringing, without a word. For a moment Kate and Claire stood silent again.

"I did n't mean you," Kate went on presently.


"This is n't the first time I've caught him. Oh, men!" She turned and closed the door. The light was waning rapidly. "Do you know why I married him? Because I was getting old, and I wanted to know what — what marriage was like. That's why, and he was the only one. I knew what you all thought about him, and what you thought, was true. Perhaps you wonder why I don't turn him out. I could. I could divorce him to-morrow; but suppose I did? I should be alone."

"I never thought you would mind that, Aunt Kate."

"I know it. Nobody thought so; but wait until you are as old as I am. You're young now, and it does n't matter, but wait until you are old enough to realize what it means to look forward with the thought that during your whole life you will be condemned to a kind of solitary confinement. That's why I don't divorce him" — Kate stopped — "Of course you can't stay here now, Claire."

"Good Heavens! Do you suppose I *want* to?" Claire cried. "I would go to-night if I knew where to go." She turned, went out of the house, and walked toward Sixth Avenue. A car stopped at the corner, and in her preoccupation she boarded it and sank into a corner seat, with no definite objective. The cumulative strain of the work at the hospital, that first introduction to death, and Weston's attack, had produced in her a stored-up fund of dread, irritation, and mental strain, which threatened momentarily to fuse and explode, with she knew not what consequences. She realized that

she must control herself firmly, and she sat in the corner of the car with clasped hands, fighting to do so. She was not conscious of the passage of time until the conductor, with the cry, "All out!" announced that the car would go no farther. They were at Fifty-Ninth Street, the southern boundary of the Park. Claire got out. It was eight o'clock. She suddenly realized that she was hungry, and began walking down Sixth Avenue. Finding a restaurant of the "table d'hôte" variety, where she and Jamie had dined occasionally in former days, she went in. The soup, one of those peasant concoctions, rich in nourishment, revived her, and she began to consider the future, but at the realization of what lay before her, the problem of finding out how simply to live by herself, panic seized her. To go to a hotel with her limited means was absurd and yet the prospect of a boarding-house filled her with vague terrors. If Jamie were only with her. Perhaps she had better cable him to come back. And if he came back? She had given him two thousand dollars. He might return with a thousand, and she had less than a thousand and herself. After that was spent, what? In a year, or less, she might be earning money as a nurse. She shuddered at the thought. How strong people like Dudley must be, to rise impervious to all the friction, the opposition, the competition, the dead weight of the bare happenings of existence. There seemed something incomprehensible, superhuman, about such achievements. She finished her dinner, got up, and took a



south-bound car. Her mind was occupied with the realization of the almost insuperable difficulties of the position she had chosen for herself, and continually, like a symbol of all the weak and helpless entities throughout the world, the sport of circumstance, the prey of the predatory, the blind victims of fate, the vision of an emaciated and scarred body, very frail and waxen, rose continually in her thoughts, and as that ignorant and frail creature had been helpless, it seemed to Claire that she, too, was helpless.

The lights of Broadway and the tall tower of a great newspaper office attracted her attention, and she got out and turned toward them through one of the cross-streets, only to be caught at once in an immense seething multitude, passing interminably in restless, intricate currents, as if impelled by motives as obscure, as apparently aimless, as those which animate a swarm of insects. The insistent sound of the news-vendors crying their extra editions seemed to set a note rising above this immense movement and conglomeration of sound, which gave it a portentous significance of warning, as if the multitude hearing it were hurrying, confusedly, without definite purpose, under a stress of terror before the approach of vast and terrifying events. Before the great newspaper office a mass of people stood looking up at the bulletins. She went nearer to them and began to read, the familiar announcements of strikes, famines, revolutions, and battles which still continued. A dread, formless and yet mighty, suddenly oppressed her. A

feeling of apprehension, a sense of foreboding, which until lately the objective mentality of her vigorous youthfulness had rarely known, suddenly chilled her. Ah, yes, she was small, weak, and alone. She had only lately begun to realize the significance of the tremendous forces at play everywhere around her.

She had had enough of her present life. She had had, ten days before, a slight touch of inflammation from one of the pneumonia patients, and had been obliged to stay at home for half a week. This, too, had pulled her down. She felt that she could not possibly endure even one more day at the hospital. She would cable Jamie to return at once, and together they would find some way. But what? In addition she would be admitting defeat. She would be a quitter. But if she could join Jamie in France, and go on with her work there, it would not be so hard. With Jamie she would have the courage her present life bereft her of. That was what she would do. But she needed money.

Whether she brought Jamie back or joined him in France, she could not see how they could manage without money.

She must make up her mind. She thought for a moment, and then, her lips tightening, she went into the lobby of a hotel which she was passing and telephoned George's apartment. In a moment George answered.

"It is Claire," she announced; "are you alone?"

George replied that he was.

"Then I shall come over; I want to see you."

On her way to George's apartment she half resolved to ask him to lend her money, but immediately saw that it would be useless. Not only was he not inclined to lend money to anybody, but he would see immediately that her need of it could be used as a means to secure for Dudley what he wanted. Therefore, on her arrival she went directly to the point.

"I have decided to do what Dudley wants me to do."

George's expression indicated approval.

"It's the only thing to do, Claire. All right; I'll have the lawyers get busy right away."

"I shall want ten thousand dollars, George."

George stared at her as if he could not believe her.

"Ten thousand dollars! Ten thousand fiddlesticks! You shall get more than that!"

"I don't want any more, George."

"Look here, Claire," George cried in sincere exasperation, "if you don't let me manage this as I like, I'll have nothing to do with it. I intend to get a good settlement for you from Dudley. If you don't want the money afterward, give it away; but I intend to do my best. Wait a minute; Dudley's stopping at the Plaza. I'll see if he's in."

Dudley was, and George seized his hat. "I'll be back in half an hour. Wait for me."

In half an hour George returned. He threw his hat on a chair, and with the air of one who expected a flood of thanks, he said abruptly:

"Two hundred thousand."

"I won't take it, George."

"Claire, you're impossible; why on earth not?"

"Because the more I take from him, the more despicable I shall seem to myself."

"Two hundred thousand is nothing to Dudley. Look here, suppose you took ten thousand. What would you do when it was gone?"

"By that time I shall be earning money."

"You really talk like a child. In a year or so you'd be asking for help again."

"I can't take it," Claire said.

George got up.

"Very well; I wash my hands of you. Go and talk to Dudley yourself."

"You know I can't do that."

"Then go to Elder and let him begin negotiations. Do you know what Dudley will do? He'll refer him to me. I've made Dudley promise that if there's any settlement at all to provide for you properly."

Claire, too, stood up, and moved toward the door. "Very well," she said, but when her hand touched the knob, she turned. She could not go away to face the old uncertainty.

"I will do it," she said.

"Now you're talking sense."

"How long will it take?"

"A few days; I'll make arrangements at once."

"And when can I — can I —"

"Get the money? The moment you've signed the papers."

Claire lowered her head to hide the mounting of a flush of shame.

"And — and — may I go away afterward?"

"Anywhere you like. The lawyers will do the rest. You need n't bother about anything. Where shall I be able to get hold of you?"

There was that in Claire's expression which made George uncomfortable. Their relations had always been quite impersonal, without a touch of that reciprocal tenderness which existed between herself and Jamie, but now he came up to her, and rather awkwardly took her hand.

"Look here," he said. "You've got the wrong idea of things. You and Dudley made a mistake in marrying. You both know it, and you would both be happier if you were free. But how does the law stand? Notwithstanding the fact that you both want it, and it would be better for you to have it, the law won't give it to you, and will block any effort you may make to get it. Well, it's a stupid law, Claire, and no unprejudiced person would blame you for refusing to be bound by the prejudices of the people who made it, I don't know how many generations ago."

But that was a matter beyond Claire's power or inclination to discuss.

"Good-night, George. It seems hard to explain."

In the morning she packed her trunks, bade Kate

good-bye, and after registering at a neighboring hotel, telephoned to George. All arrangements would be complete, and the evidence secured immediately. In four days the papers would be ready for her signature. Claire, on hearing this, went first to her bank, and then once more to Cook's. She secured passage on a boat sailing for France in ten days, and cabled Jamie to meet her at Havre on her arrival there. She went out. The canyon of the Avenue stretched before her, sunk in shadow. High up, the flags floated in the radiance of the western sun. Higher still, soft, serried ranks of small and pinkish clouds. Higher still, calm, pale depths of sky. The beauty of the afternoon moved her, but failed to buoy her up. She was sunk in the depths of a slough of weariness, shame, and humiliation. She essayed to walk, but an unaccountable lassitude weighted her limbs. She hailed a taxi-cab, returned to her hotel, and could hardly summon strength to get to her room. It occurred to her that the slight inflammation which she had contracted at the hospital was returning again, and alarmed at the thought that she might be on the verge of illness, she telephoned the doctor. At all hazards she must sail on the steamer to France, and seeking the couch which stood at the foot of her bed, she waited. She had been lucky enough to find him at home, and he was coming at once.

Some one knocked, and in response to her summons he came in, accompanied by a slight, pleasant odor of tweeds and tobacco. He had not changed. His dress

was the same, very baggy and comfortable, his beard and mustache still crisply gray and curling, and the clasp of his large, warm hand as reassuring as ever. He looked at her shyly. The half-paternal feeling he had had for her in the past was gone. She was no longer a little girl. No longer a young lady. She was a woman. He had grown a little afraid of her. Bending over, and breathing heavily, he put his ear to her back, then to her chest, thumped her with his large fingers, drew out his stethoscope, used it, felt her pulse, placed a thermometer between her lips, and then looking at her shyly once more, he said:

"You must go to bed. What have you been doing? You look tired out, and you have a temperature."

"I was afraid so; I have been nursing in a hospital."

"You!" cried the doctor. "I knew something had happened, but — well, I'll telephone for a nurse."

"I must sail for France in ten days."

"For France!" cried the doctor again.

"Yes; Jamie's there, and I am going over to help if I can."

In so far as his mellow temperament would allow, the doctor was piqued.

"And I did n't know anything about it. Well, that's the way. You bring people into the world, watch them grow up, and see them slip away and forget about you. I'm afraid I'm getting old. When I was younger I did n't mind."

"You should have married, doctor."

"And you say that?"

"The right one, of course."

"Ah, yes — perhaps. Well —!" He got up, and overcoming with an effort his shyness, he suddenly patted her head — "But don't talk; you're tired."

"One thing more. I want to find out just the right man at the Red Cross in Paris to give me real work to do."

"I know him," the doctor answered. "I'll give you a letter to him."

"And, doctor, I can go in ten days?"

"Perhaps, if you will do exactly what I tell you to."

He went to the telephone, found, after one or two unsuccessful efforts, a certain nurse, and turned to Claire.

"I am going out to get a prescription filled. While I am away I want you to go to bed. I shall be back in fifteen — no, twenty minutes; that will give you time enough."

He went away. Claire tried to undress hurriedly, but found that she could not. She seemed each moment to be growing weaker, but with a determined effort she managed to get into bed before he returned. She knew from his quietness, the absence of his usual hearty manner, that her condition was giving him some concern, but for the moment she was oblivious to all except that the bed she had finally sunk into was restful beyond belief, and that she had the doctor's sturdy dependability to rely on.

He returned presently, gave her a spoonful of the

contents of a bottle he was carrying, closed the blinds and opened the windows to his satisfaction. A knock sounded, and the nurse came in, already dressed for service, in her fresh cotton uniform and white cap.

"This young lady," said the doctor, "is anxious to sail for France in ten days. If she obeys orders I think she may be able to, but no newspapers, no books, no worry, and no exertion."

He turned to Claire — "Lie still and rest. You've got a good nurse, who will do everything. Don't even think."

But this order Claire could not obey. The one thought which she could not drive away was that, in assenting to Dudley's wishes, she had lost Felix. Her participation in a sordid intrigue to free herself from Dudley made her love for Felix an impossible thing. Over and over she tried by some means to justify herself, by some swerve of argument to convince herself that her criticism of herself was due to hypersensitiveness, but without success. Over and over she caught up, pursued, and let go various threads of thought, hoping to find one which would lead her out of the somber depths in which she groped, until they began to move, to spin of themselves, intricate, luminous patterns against a background of darkness, contracting and opening out faster and faster, bursting into rocket-like, starry explosions, to form again into intricate, moving, luminous lines, until at last, growing dimly red and pale, to fade into the obscure depths of unconsciousness or the troubled sleep of fever.

One morning she awoke to a sense of mental ease, but of great weakness. The fever had left her. When the doctor came she asked, "How much time have I before my boat sails?"

"Four days," he answered, sitting down beside her.

"Shall I be able to go?"

The doctor, who had taken his thermometer from its case, thrust it between her lips and opened his watch. Presently he returned the watch to his pocket, and, taking the thermometer to the light, examined it closely.

"Your fever is gone. I think that we can manage it, but you must be very careful."

"Has my brother George been here?"

"Yes; but I would n't let him see you."

"It's very important."

"I know; in fact I know all about it." The doctor said this with evident satisfaction. "I will send for him as soon as I can; perhaps day after to-morrow."

It was, as a matter of fact, the day before Claire's boat was to sail that George was permitted to see her. He came with a notary. The doctor, too, was there. Claire was sitting up for the first time, and they brought a small table, and placed the papers before her. Although she had been impatient to get it over, now that the moment had come she felt that she could not do it. She felt that she was bartering her love for a little money; that she was signing her own death-warrant. However, she signed, after the doctor had insisted on reading the

papers carefully, and taking in his keeping the certified check George had brought with him.

When George had gone she said:

“Shall I be able to go to-morrow, doctor?”

“I think so. You’re pretty weak, but the season is favorable and the voyage will do you good. I have just come from the ship. I got a better stateroom for you and saw the doctor. He is a capable man, and promised to look after you. I will see that you are safely on board myself. But, must you go? Why not cable Jamie to come here?”

“I want to get away.”

“I don’t blame you. Well, you can do what you please now.”


The doctor took the check George had left from his pocket, looked at it with curiosity, and then placed it on the table before Claire. “Endorse this over to your bank, and I will take it up and deposit it. Two hundred thousand dollars! That will keep the wolf from the door!”

“Oh, but, doctor,” she cried, with a mixture of despair and sorrow. “I have given for it something worth so much more! Something I shall never have again!”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE stateroom which the doctor had chosen rather staggered Claire by its luxury and size, and yet she realized almost at once his reasons for taking it. The journey to the boat left her far more exhausted than she would have thought possible, and she was very thankful for the real bed it contained, and the private bathroom adjoining it. The room, too, being on the upper deck, had windows instead of the usual port lights, and its door opened into a passage which led immediately to the deck itself.

For three days Claire did not leave her room, content to lie nervelessly, drinking the strong air of the sea, which came in through the slatted windows, but on the evening of the fourth she felt so much stronger that she dressed and went out. The deck at this point was deserted, and leaning against the railing of the ship, she stood alone in the immense expanse of sky and ocean which stretched above and around her. The sea was calm. Stars were beginning to show in a pale sky from which day was reluctantly withdrawing. From time to time the ship lifted slowly to an indolent, recurring swell. She looked ahead. Beyond the vast reaches of the ocean the coast of France lay, and Jamie was waiting for her. Hour by hour, the ship was bearing her toward a world recovering slowly from a recent madness, a world given over to teeming armies, savagery,



ruin, fire, wounds, and death, and the lurid flash of guns settling things the only way imperial man knows, finally, how to settle them. And in the wake of thunder and darkness, of this storm of war, needs more bitter than America had known would give her her opportunity. Her distaste of what her life had lately been, and of herself, for the course she had taken in order to escape from it, made her, in her sense of humiliation and weakness, long for another chance to prove what she could do. She had been too utterly alone, but in this new test Jamie would be near her, and under the demands of the iron necessities of the hour, she would grow strong, careless of self, self-reliant, and able to bear and face the burden she had irrevocably shouldered: the burden of having by her action put aside her happiness forever.

She stood for a time quite motionless.

Could it be that she had put away her chances for the future beyond recovery?

Felix would be there waiting for her. Of that she was certain. Would she never feel that she might send for him? Was she imposing upon herself too hard a penalty for yielding to the pressure of what seemed an extreme necessity? She could not tell. The future alone would show. She had made a bargain so repugnant to her sense of self-respect that she could not rid herself of the feeling that she had indelibly stained herself and that it would be impossible for her ever to make use of a freedom secured as she had secured hers.

And yet — beyond, lay Europe ill, wounded, starving. Perhaps through the very efforts she had resolved to make — and she would see to it that they did not spare her — she would find in time that her stains had been worn away.

Ah, if she could believe that, she could face the future without impatience and without fear.

At a distance, toward the bow, people lounged on the lower decks. A young officer above her leaned idly against the rail, looking ahead. Smoke poured from the funnels of the ship, and, with the foam of its wake, streamed backward far into the distance. The serenity of the hour and the recuperative agencies at work within her began to pour a balm upon her wounded spirit. Darkness grew. The distance became a soft and formless void. Each moment now myriads of worlds took up their places in the sky. The ship lifted slowly up, up to the mild surge of the sea.

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